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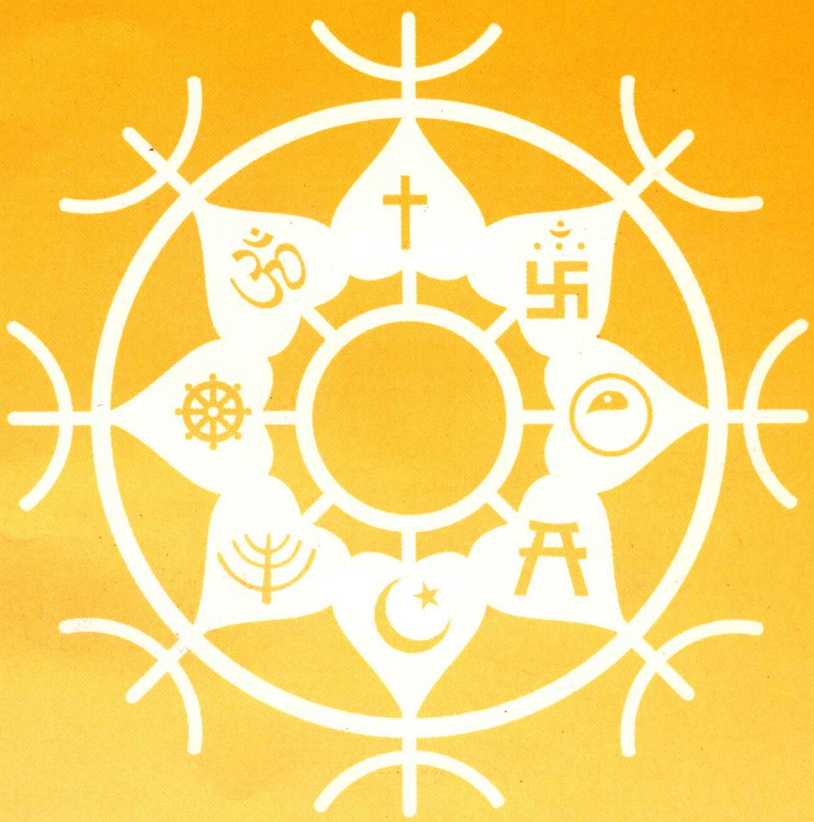

ENVIRONMENT AND RELIGION

July-September 2011 Vol. 36, No. 3

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AN OUTLINE FOR ECO-THEOLOGY

V. F. Vineeth

1. Introduction

My Lord, my God,
You are the Word, Eternal and Ineffable,
You created the world, the earth and the Heavens,
The whole universe (Jn. 1:3),
As your own dwelling place.
Not one thing was made without you (Jn. 1:3),
You made them all for you,
For all of us, your own image in Human flesh (Gen. 1:26)
In the fullness of time, you became a human being,
And full of grace and truth, lived among us (Jn. 1:14)

Our loving Father, now we pray for your grace and blessing, that we, your, beloved children, may live with you in this house of God, you have created on earth which you place in this vast universe, your wonderful gift for all your children.

2. The Theology of the House of God

The universe was originally conceived as the house of God, for the Word to dwell in and of course for all those who bear his image. This prayer above, I hope, could be a scriptural as well as a theological basis for what we call "Eco-Theology."

Literally eco-theology means: a theology which is very much concerned about, or conceives the universe as the House of God: i.e., A theology of the house of God. The concept is of a single house comprising the whole universe/creation of which God Himself is the Father and Mother and we all are His children. All his children of this holy house, living on this small planet earth, are expected to accept and acknowledge the Father lovingly and respectfully, observe the divine rhythm and harmony. He, the Father and the Creator, has established all through this

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house of the universe. Naturally we develop a theology of this House. Deeply seen, it seems to me that eco-theology is the theology of the kingdom of God on earth, where God, is the loving Father and the benevolent king, and all his children live in harmony and unity of heart, not exploiting the wealth of the Father at the expense of other children, not only of this generation but also the generations to come. Sustainable development is welcome; but this should be done not in violence against the harmony God has placed in human hearts and their relationship to one another, to their abode on earth, and in relationship to the atmosphere, to the globes, such as sun, moon, stars and the universe at large. All are interrelated and interdependent. No one can amass all or what is possible in any way, for oneself at the cruel neglect of the other. This is the inner core of eco-theology or spirituality and it should be joyfully celebrated than discussed. In reality this is the picture of the so-called paradise in the Bible.[1] In paradise there was the unbroken flow of divine rhythm the source of which was God himself, and this divine rhythm permeated every nook and corner of the paradise, promising peace and prosperity to all, to humans, animals, birds, trees, forests, to all plants and creatures.

3. The Divine Rhythm of the Universe: Indian Perspective

All religious scriptures of the world generally stand for an eco-friendly atmosphere for life and are against violence to one another. The harmony which has been originated from the primordial being (*sat*)[2] whose word is truth (*satya*) is the basis of all rhythm and harmony in our life. Buddhist's principles of *ahimsa* and *karuna* (non-violence and compassion) do not need any comment. According to Islam, we humans are only care-takers of this wonderful universe, not owners, much less dictators or rulers. I am now highlighting a few texts from Hindu scriptures which are very transparent and conducive to our point.

Reminding us very strongly the prologue of John's Gospel, a text from *Taittiriya Brahmana* reads as follows:

> The Word, imperishable, is the Firstborn of Truth, mother of the Veda and hub of immortality. May she come to us in happiness in the sacrifice! May she, our protecting Goddess, be easy of entreaty![3]

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[1]Genesis 1:29-31; 2:8-17.

[2]*Sad eva aga asit, evam ekadvadiyam: Chandogya Upanisad*, VI.2.1.

[3]Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari – An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977, 88.

Interpreting this text, the famous indologist Raimundo Panikkar says: The Truth, whose Firstborn is the Word, is not a mere static truth or a sheer moral truthfulness; it is the dynamic order of the entire reality, the primordial activity out of which everything comes to be; it is *rta*.[4]

The text says truth (*satya*) is the primordial utterance (word) of the claim of *sat* (being). When the human being participates in this word, uttered to him by God (the *sat, ekam evam, advidiyam*), he/she really becomes the image of the divine. As the Word is the source of all rhythm in the universe, this abiding image, is the source and inner controller (*antaryamin*) of harmony in our life. This is the basis of eco-theology or eco-spirituality. This is well confirmed by another text from *Atharvaveda:*

> Abiding by cosmic order he (the Word) fixed as his seat
> The mighty firmaments of Heaven and Earth.[5]

The word creates the cosmic order and abides by that. Naturally all that has been created is happy about the reigning order and rhythm in the universe of mankind. The Upanishads elucidates it later, praising the reigning rhythm and harmony in all creation, beginning with the elements.

> This earth is (like) honey for all creatures, and all creatures, are (like) honey to the earth. This shining, immortal person who is in the earth, and with reference to oneself, this shining immortal person who is in the body, he indeed is just the Self (*atma*). This is immortal, this Brahman. This is all.[6]

Incidentally in the Vedic Sanskrit the word Brahman also meant 'word' or 'utterance.' The Upanishad then continues the same text with regard to all elements and many other realities of human life, such as law, truth, etc. Regarding Law and Truth, with reference to the individual self the text says, 'this shining immortal person who lives as 'law abidingness' and 'truthfulness' respectively. All elements, globes and humankind are referred to as honey to one another, and the shining immortal person, who is immortal, who is Brahman abides in all of them. This chapter ends with13 verses.[7] The last two are the following:

> This (individual) self is honey to all beings and all beings are honey for this self. The shining immortal person who is in this (individual

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[4]Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 100.
[5]*Adharva Veda*, IV.1.
[6]*Brahadaranyaka Up.* II.5.1.
[7]*Brahd.Up.* II.5.1-13.

> self) is just this (Absolute) Self, this is immortal, this is Brahman, this is all.[8]
>
> This Self (Absolute), verily is the Lord of all being, the king of all beings. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so, in this Self, all beings, all gods, all worlds, all breathing creatures, all these selves are held together.[9]

This is the eternal wheel of Divine rhythm and harmony. If this order of spokes around the centre, individuals around the one hub (God) is maintained, we will always live in a world of eco-friendliness, environmental solidarity and divine prosperity. But unfortunately the rhythm was tarnished. The result is chaos, disorder, global warming, melting of icebergs (mountains), rise of sea waters, threat of extinction to people living in small islands, etc.

4. Fall of Humankind and Loss of Divine Rhythm: Rise of *Ahamkara*

4.1. The Indian Prelude and the Paradise-Story of Sin

India does not give us a story of sin committed by men or women as narrated in the book of Genesis. India gives us a clue to understand what happened to our first parents in the paradise. I am taking this clue from Samkhya philosophy which deals with the evolution of *prakrti*, the chaotic original stuff in its *amorpha* (preformed state), ready to be evolved at the reflection of the so-called *purusa* (consciousness) which are two opposite poles of consciousness in the *samkhyan* dualism. As *purusa* reflects on *prakrti*, it automatically wakes up to orderliness and start evolving. The first evolutes of this fusion of *purusa* and *prakrti*, consciousness and matter, is *buddhi* or cosmic consciousness. Cosmos, which until this moment was simply a lump of chaotic clay or formless matter, suddenly begins to evolve with a new consciousness of order and rhythm. Yes, *purusa*'s 'gene' i.e., consciousness has entered into matter, ready for further evolution, heading for the creation of a perfect human being as an embodiment of a unit of divine consciousness from *purusa*. But before the further steps are realized a by-product entered into *buddhi* and in the second stage of evolution *buddhi* (cosmic consciousness) has changed into *ahamkara*, the ego-consciousness or I-centred action (*aham-kar*).

Gift of consciousness in matter is both a risk and real wonder. What a strange combination! Matter is devoid of consciousness and is destined to be finite by nature. Consciousness, on the other hand, because it

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[8] *Brahd.Up*. II.5.14.
[9] *Brahd.Up*. II.5.15.

participates in divine consciousness, has a virtual infinity, ready to rise to divine likeness and image. This combination is wonderful, because in the heart of matter now there is the 'pulsation' of a breath of life, not only vegetative or sensitive, but also spiritual and thus becomes the house of God, *Oikos tou thei, Domus Dei,* which of course is placed in the larger cosmic house God has designed for the humans. This is the marvellous wonder. The risk factor is the rise of *Ahamkara,* the temptation to assert itself over against the donor of the very consciousness the human being has received. All the lower grade of creation, which God had already prepared for the humans, did not have this temptation, because consciousness, a drop of divinity, was not there. This drop of divinity is the image of God, the so-called soul, spirit, participating in the nature of God, who is also by nature Spirit, i.e., pure and unbounded consciousness, as expressed in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1).

4.2. The Serpent and Human Consciousness

The serpent which entered into the paradise could be seen as a symbol of human consciousness, which can recoil into itself and rise up with or against God. In the Indian Kundalini Yoga the human consciousness is compared to a serpent which has to go through seven stages of consciousness (*cakras*) and ends up in the eighth which is the ultimate and perfect stage. But it may stop anywhere and block the progress. The lower levels are very much matter and brain-bound and are at the risk of 'temptation' to over assert itself. The result would be total failure in achieving the goal. In the biblical story the result was the expulsion of the first parents from the paradise.

In fact, it seems to me, no expulsion ever took place, nor was there a paradise separate from the earth. This earth, which was flourishing in divine favour and heavenly harmony was the paradise before sin, and with sin, when the basic rhythm was distorted, this very earth turned to be the miserable abode of humankind, producing 'thorns and thistles' (Genesis 3:18), everywhere. The paradise changed to be our present earth. Supposing the paradise was our present Afghanistan, where we find rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the tower of Babel etc., the eco-friendly paradise and all its vicinity changed to be desert-lands on the face of the earth. Hence, suffering began, and human beings had to earn their daily food with sweat of their brows (Genesis 3:19). What is suffering if not the awareness of disorder? Hard labour became necessary to produce vegetation on earth, because of the curse of distorting the divine rhythm fell on earth, reaching

out to its farther dimensions of atmosphere and the cosmos. Mankind naturally turned to God with repentance and offering to please him. He performed sacrifice.

5. Sacrifice to Restore the Lost Divine Rhythm of the Universe

Yajna was a new invention. How to restore the rhythm of the universe? The idea was to offer the distorted earth together with the universe, that God be reconciled with us and thus the lost rhythm be restored. Raimundo Panikkar says: "If one had to choose a single word to express the quintessence of the vedic revelation, the word *yajna,* sacrifice, would perhaps be the most adequate."[10] Yajna, sacrifice, is an act of repentance and reparation, an act of reconciliation of the universe based on the original divine rhythm. For this, certain preferred objects, flowers, plants, animals or birds were selected and sacrificed or offered to God as a symbol of the offering of the whole universe back to God, praying that He should once again reign over this home of God given to us, his children. *Ayam yujno bhavanasya nabhi* (This sacrifice is the navel of the universe) (*RgVeda* 1.64.35) is a famous vedic text.

The culture of sacrifice is seen both in India and Israel. India considered Fire as the High Priest, the offerer of sacrifice. *RgVeda* begins with a hymn to fire, the offerer of sacrifice:

> I magnify God, the Divine Fire, the priest, minister of sacrifice, the offerer of oblation, supreme giver of treasure (*RgVeda* 1.1.1).

When Rgveda laid great emphasis on fire as God and the offerer of sacrifice, Israel's attention was more drawn to the victim of sacrifice. In the book of Exodus we read all the details prescribed with regard to this victim of sacrifice and sacrifice was to be performed as a prelude to their own liberation (Exodus 12:1-13).

When Jesus came, he offered a sacrifice in which priest and victim, the offerer and what is offered, in the sacrifice became one and the same. This means that what is offered is not an object or a creature (animal or bird) from the world, but the very self of the offerer. This is because the cause of the destruction of the divine rhythm in the world and the universe at large is not any of the creatures being sacrificed, but the boosted Ego or the ahamkara of the offerer or of all who are represented by him, namely by the human being.

We humans are responsible for the loss of harmony in the universe, for the emission of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, for the pollution of

[10]Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 347.

the air, and consequently for the climate change and global warming. We should come to the negotiating table with an open heart to reduce, at least relatively, the emission of any polluting stuff into the air around us and the atmosphere above us. This means readiness to sacrifice the boosting of our own ego beyond certain limits. The *ahamkara*, understood as the enlarging of one's own ego, by unchecked trends of industrialization in the name of advance and progress, exploiting nature, by cutting trees for sale of woods, destroying sand beds on either sides of the running rivers, and any such action led by lucrative motivation of a private individual or group, at the expense of the just claim for a clean nature by all the people around is the person or villain (wrong-doer) responsible for the destruction of the ecological balance. All these demand the shedding of our selfishly motivated ego on the altar of sacrifice. This will take us to the next section: the contemporary awakening of Eco-theology or spirituality, environmental sanity, safety and so on.

6. Secular Awakening of Ecology and Environmental Sanity

In the contemporary world, what we see is that many of our national and political leaders have taken the issue of a sound ecological balance and environmental sanity as an agenda for their collective deliberations. Of course NGOs and activists have voiced this theme much before. Two great steps are:

1. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), founded on June 1972 at Stockholm with Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. UNEP has six regional offices and various country offices. UNEP Co-ordinates United Nations environmental activities implementing sound policies and practices.

2. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Rio de Janeiro, from June 3-14, 1992, reaffirmed the declaration made at Stockholm on June 16, 1972. A global plan of action to promote sustainable development was adopted and a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of states were accepted and in the conference. The first 10 and the last one are given below:

Principle 1: Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

Principle 2: States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and

developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control, do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

Principle 3: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.

Principle 4: In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

Principle 5: All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.

Principle 6: The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.

Principle 7: States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

Principle 8: To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

Principle 9: States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.

Principle 10: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information

concerning the environment that is held by public authorizes, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

Principle 27: States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfilment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development

The UN General Assembly convened a special session on the environment in 1997 to review and appraise the implementation of agenda and principles. In the following year the Kyto protocol was agreed upon to meet the challenge of climate change. A follow up of the Earth-summit of 1992 was convened in 2002 and The Earth Charter was declared.

These are ideals proposed and are for the moment only in our mind level. When it comes to the real execution of the same, the rich nations, whom it more carbon to the atmosphere and thus pollute our common environment are often reluctant to fall in line with the proposals. This is a matter of selfishness over against a care of universal friendliness and harmony of nature for all.

The real question is the question of interdependence between the humans and nature. Do the human beings in the world really love the 'Nature' (*Prakrti*) around them or do they look at nature only to use or exploit to their advantage (i.e., momentary). The question is of the nature of relationship: Is it of love or utility? If it is of love we will preserve nature in is purity, beauty and friendliness. If it is of utility we will manipulate nature to our temporary and silly advantages, which in log run, will be extremely damaging. But a better attitude is just to learn to love nature, love trees, innocent creatures, be at home with all of them. Try to realize here a 'mini-paradise' in our own way. It is wonderful to see in many houses not too far away from our cities, how villagers live with cows under the same roof.

Nature follows the Eternal Law written in them by God: the Law of Universal Rhythm and Harmony. The human beings should rise up to that standard of discerning, appreciating and delicately protecting this divine rhythm, God has placed in nature. The human being is endowed with the gift o self-awareness, which we call consciousness. This is certainly a gift

and a call to participate in the consciousness of God. But this can also be a threat to the cosmic rhythm, because of an individual self centeredness, as human consciousness, can be misused of one's own selfish growth, violating the rhythm of universal harmony. Effectively this is what we all sin. We are destroying our won beauty, simplicity, transparency ad naturally he all pervading rhythms of the universe. After the first sin, the paradise became this permanent earth producing 'thorns and thistles' (Genesis 3.18) symbolizing the loss of rhythm and harmony.

7. Ecology and the Problem of Climate Justice

Eco-theology, related to eco-justice and eco-ethics, is a vexing problem of our time. The problem in short is this: who are the polluters and who are the victims? The saddest fact is that the crucial and first victims are those who have not contributed anything substantial to the pollution of the environment and the resultant global warming, melting of ice, rising of the sea water. Poor people living in the smallest islands are the first victims.

Similarly large scale deforestation for the sake of industrial development has a double damaging result. First of all they deprive the people living in the forests, their means of only reliable livelihood. Secondly, the onslaught of industry naturally destroys the entire eco-friendly and healthy atmosphere of the place where the nature-friendly people live. How to balance between sustainable development and maintenance of ecological sanity and purity of the atmosphere? Dr. Christoph Stückelberger says:

> Climate change shows, as never in the past, how much all human beings depend on each other. It is more than the global village metaphor; it is the concrete experience of global *interdependence* and interconnectedness which is an opportunity for increased *solidarity* and mutual responsibility. The ethical golden rule (do to others what you want them to do for you) becomes even more evident.[11]

In all these matters the greed of the rich and powerful for their own self-boosting enterprises find its way and the need of the poor to whom probably the area originally belonged, was often neglected. Thanks to the new laws enacted by the respective governments, such as the forest land is primarily for the forest-people, is a certain, just barrier against the

[11]Christoph Stueckelberger, *We All Are Guests on Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011, 45.

exploitation of the poor and the voiceless. Because of the contemporary awareness building in these matters, the situation is certainly changing.

8. Ashrams and the Spirit of Eco-Theology and Spirituality

All ashrams, Hindu or Christian, stand for a lecture of love for nature and silence. Silence and love for nature go together. There is a notable difference between natural sounds and artificial sounds. One who meditates in the heart of nature, or in the forest, does not feel distracted by the lovely sound of the birds chirping in the woods and the soothing noise of running waters. When I was walking through a forest area in Singapore (a nation which keeps its forests as gold), I found a small message written on the side of the pathway: "Forest is a living organism which gives shade even to those who come to cut down its trees" (Lord Buddha).

In the famous work *Shakuntalam* by Kalidasa, the precincts of a sacred grove at Kanva Maharshi's ashram are described by King Dushyanta as follows:

> The roots of yon trees are bathed in the waters of canals which quivers as the wind plays upon them; the glowing lustre of the fresh leaves is partially obscured by the smoke that rises from (oblations of) clarified butter; and here in front, these young fawns are leisurely grazing without fear on the garden-lawns where the sprouts of Darbha-grass have been cut away.[12]

This means that nature and silence go together and both are potential means to feel the hidden presence of God. It is nature that silently speaks about the presence of the missing Beloved to the mystic, the lover of God. Thus, St. John of the Cross, the Carmelite mystic, asks the creatures:

> O woods and thickets
> Planted by the hand of my Beloved!
> O green meadow,
> Coated, bright, with flowers,
> Tell me, has He passed by you?
> The nature responds to the query:
> Pouring out a thousand graces,
> He passed these groves in haste;
> And having looked at them,
> With His image alone,

[12]Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, in *Works of Kalidasa*: *Dramas*, ed. C. R. Devadhan, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1966, 1:13.

Clothed them in beauty.[13]

We see that ashrams are usually founded on riverbanks or on mountaintops or in the slops or valleys combing both of them. Shivananda Ashram and many other Hindu ashrams, including a Christian ashram, are seen on either banks of the river Ganges. The Benedictine ashram on Kurisumala, among the Vagamon Mountains in Kerala is famous, especially among Christians.

This scenic beauty as well as the serene atmosphere brings along with them a sense of silence and inspiring feeling of the presence of the divine in the midst. In the book *Swapna Vasavadatta*, a visitor, watching the nature and surroundings of a place, comes to the conclusion that this must be an ashram campus. He exclaims:

> The herds of deer graze without fear or hesitation, a yard full of trees bowing down with ripe fruits and plants with colourful flowers untouched. Doves and sparrows fly fearless all over among thick tree lines. This, of course, is not a field but an ashram. Also, holy odour of incense emerging from the fire of sacrifice rises to the sky. This is certainly an ashram campus.[14]

The description says that ashram is a place in the heart of nature, covered with trees and flowery meadows where innocent animals are free to run around and greet people. Equally seen are the birds of the air for which the ashramites give shelter and food.[15]

All ashrams try to cultivate a spirit of detachment and austerity in direct contrast to the spirit of *ahamkara* and ego-centred activity, as we have seen above. The core spirituality is inner freedom. To possess inner freedom, we have to cut the threads of all desires which bind us to anything other than God. At the same time, all creatures remind us of God's love, beauty, and concern for us. The *Bhyagavad Gita*, in chapter 2, speaks largely about the virtue of detached activity for the sake of the Lord. Therefore, the ashramites practice self-control to rise above all desires and to realize God within. *Tapas* or austerity is the hallmark of a true ashramite. The word '*tapas*' means inner ardour which burns from

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[13]John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 4-5 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1996.

[14]Bhasa, *Swapna Vasavadatta*, Act I.12, Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1946, 85.

[15]Such a description of the ashram campus is further confirmed by *Abhijnana-Sakuntalam* by Kalidasa, as mentioned above (See Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:13).

within and rises up from the heart of the seeker with a burning zeal to give up everything and seek the way of the Lord alone. In *Abhijnana Sakunthalam*, King Dushyanta says:

> Holy men, preeminent in the virtue of quietism, conceal within their bosom a searching flame which like sun crystals which are grateful to the touch, they emit when assailed by foreign lustre.[16]

Saying this, King Dushyanta extols the fire of austerity (*tapas*) burning in the heart of the ashramites. This fire makes them capable of rising above everything and remains detached from anything, leading a life of self-control, transcendence, and inner freedom. We also see King Dushyanta extolling Kanva Maharshi as "chaste, gentle, pure and holy in the world's regard. Even virtue may swerve from its course, but he would never swerve from his vow."[17]

9. Conclusion

To relish the beauty of creation in its true nature, we have to look at nature through the eyes of faith. Then only the ineffable mysteries hidden in nature will be unveiled to our soul, transcending the level of mind. Science and scientific discoveries are certainly most welcome and will never contradict faith in depth, "for earthly matters and the concern of faith derive from the same God."[18] The ecological vision of this emerging theology can be summarized as follows:

1. The idea of divine immanence in the whole cosmos;

2. A relational, ecological rather than a hierarchical understanding of God, humans, and the created world;

3. A radically reinterpreted view of human dominion over nature in terms of partnership with nature; and

4. A commitment of justice for all creatures, not just humans, highlighting the needs of the impoverished masses and endangered species around the globe.

In the Oriental tradition the Canonical prayers of the Liturgical Seasons end up with the season of the Dedication of the Church. The hymns and prayers of the Season often describe this universe as the house of God. Several times we see that the prayers have direct reference to this earth and universe as house of God. Of course this house is understood as the church of God. But church is not just building and administration. It is

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[16]Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:49.

[17]Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, 1:vii (Introduction).

[18]Vatican II, "The Church Today," §36.

primarily a centre for celebration in the house of God where God our Father and we his children meet in his home on earth, bring offering gathered from the earth, representing the whole earth, that all the earth and heavens magnify the Lord along with the melody of *magnificat* which our souls sing with Mary our Mother (Luke 1:46-55).

Coming to the liturgical prayer of the season, as mentioned above, the first hymn of the season, namely the Sunday Ramsa's first hymn (*onisad'kdam*) sings:

Lord, Almighty One,
I knock at the door
of your earthly home.
Keeping the word that You gave:
"My Name shall be ever there,"
Keep this house of holiness;
Hear your servants' petitions;
Have mercy on us, Your people.

And again in the concluding hymn:

Heav'n and earth and all therein
are filled with Your glory, Lord;
Angels and al heav'nly ones
Worship, praise and adore You.
Holy Church and all creatures
stand in worship before You;
We, your humble servants, Lord,
enter Your house and give praise.

Time and again references are made to God's dwelling with us in this house of God which is the Church. Yes, the Church is the house of God and this house, in its wider dimension comprises the whole humanity and the universe. The Eucharistic celebration is the mystery (*raza*) in which the re-integration of the universe with the divine rhythm, achieved by Christ our Lord, is celebrated. The Eastern liturgies in the Church and the longstanding cultures of ashrams in India have always stood for an eco-friendly ambience and atmosphere. So let us be happy and promise the Lord to ever remain God-friendly and eco-friendly.

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ANIMATED ENVIRONMENT
"*Animism*" and the Environment Revisited

Maheshvari Naidu[♦]

1. Preamble

Some of my earliest memories of religious behaviour involve my grandmother whom I seemed to have followed around in loving docility for much of my early formative years ... and a large spherical stone, which we would both meticulously and unfailingly wash and apply red ash and turmeric paste to every Friday.[1] This 'stone,' was placed next to other sculpted images of the more popular and recognizable Hindu Goddesses in full anthropomorphic form, all of whom were housed in a small shrine temple space in our garden. Although very much the typical child with an overly interrogative mind that sought to analyse and sometimes annoyingly dissect many aspects of life that seemed opaque to a ten year old ... I never questioned my grandmother as to why we had this ritual 'bathing' and 'anointing' of a stone. It was rather experienced on emotional and cognitive levels, as being very natural, and quite the normal thing to do. I seemed to 'know' instinctively that the stone was in some way 'animated' with 'something,' and that knowing sufficed for me.

2. Introduction

This paper is an examination of the notion of animism and environmental relationality, and probes the plausibility of the resonance of 'animism' and the so called 'animistic practices' within a contemporary environmental consciousness. The revival of both theoretical and ethnographic work on animism by scholars such as Bird-David et al[2] and Descola[3] and the

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[1]'Fridays' are considered especially auspicious in the worship of the Feminine Goddess in much of the polyvocal Hindu tradition.

[2]Bird-David, N. and D. Naveh, "Relational Epistemology, Immediacy, and Conservation: Or, What Do the Nayaka Try to Conserve?" *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 2, 1, 2008, 55-73.

[3]Philippe Descola, *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia:* Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1994.

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development of perspectivism[4] by Viveiros de Castro, which is an approach to indigenous Amerindian cosmological notions,[5] reveal substantive departure from the orthodox structuralist vocabularies, and understandings that sought to polarize nature and culture into neat binaries. Terence Turner states that 'animism' and 'perspectivism' represent two responses from the structuralist tradition, to what he sees as a theoretical crisis of structuralism[6] that is outdated in terms of recent ethnographies, or recent analyses of 'old' ethnographies. For me then, this intellectual milieu creates the space for a critical re-engagement with the notion of animism and what it may offer to contemporary environmental perspectives that seek to collapse and make more permeable, the living and non-living divide between us and the (inanimate environment).

While this is in large part, an analytical and theoretical discussion on animism and environment, it holds audience with ethnographic illustrations from the fieldwork of anthropologist Nurit Bird-David's work[7] with the South Indian community of the forest dwelling hunter-gatherer Nayaka, and their relationship to their environment. It also includes the shared stories of a small sample of South African grandmothers whose narratives also speak about a particular way of relating to the environment. Finally, the paper proposes 'perspectival edges' or the blurring of the edges where two perspectives or insights, in this case the perspective of animism and that of relational self, 'meet.' These would be spaces where insights and practices can be carried across from animism and feed into contemporary notions of *relating* to the environment.

It was perhaps a provocative personal starting point that my own grandmother and the stone exist alongside each other in my particular landscape of 'memory of religion and environment', epitomized in the ritualized stone. For while the grandmother represents the intergenerational transfer of religious knowledge and religious behaviour,

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[4]Perspectivism as a philosophical position asserts that that there can be no 'perspective free' or 'interpretation free', objective reality.

[5]The Brazilian anthropologist, Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro developed Amazonian Perspectivism.

[6]Terence Turner, 'Perspectivism in the Crisis of Late Structuralism: A Critical Engagement,"http://www.newstudiesonshamanism.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/01/PERSPECTIVISMANIMISM.doc. Accessed online 5 May 2011.

[7]Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology*, 40, S1, special issue on "Culture – A Second Chance?" 1999, 67-91.

from her through to me, the stone represents my earliest engagement with both religion and environment, and on a ritual and cognitive level, religious behaviour that has come to be termed as being 'animistic.'

It was one of my earliest reflective experiences with the environment being seen and experienced as 'being alive.' It was additionally an experience different from the Piaget-type psychological animism or enlivened environment experiences that very young children, all necessarily transit through. This however, was an introspective experience of the stone being much more than a physical stone, and a palpable experience of it being inhabited by some kind of 'life' and of there being a permeable boundary between me and the 'stone'. And although I had not the vocabulary at the time, the remembered sense towards the stone was one of religious communion rather than worship.

It was a stone yes... but it was also much more than just a stone, and very different from other such stones lying around. Critics with a more unilineal comprehension of a monotheistic God (blind to the richness of polyvocal theisms) or scholars with a modernistic 'way of knowing' (blind to the fluid nature of constructivist realities), may well refer to this as being *infantile* in terms of *both* religious and epistemological sophistication. Far from being either though, these early recollections are also an early recollection of a rich understanding of the environment as something that was alive with a power and of being and feeling *related* to this power. It was many years later, in the lectures in 'Comparative Religion,' or what was then termed as 'Science of Religion' that I was formally (re)introduced to the phenomena. It was now labelled within the lexicon of early anthropological work in religion, as animism in the schema of 'primitive' or the more politically correct terminology of, 'pre-industrial' religions and religious behaviour. Drawing from the work of the perceived early benchmark thinkers in anthropology, especially Edward Burnet Tylor, it was taught as man's (sic) childlike grasp of understanding the universe, and as being religiously and epistemologically primitive. This however, was far removed from my own understanding.

3. Animism: Not So Unsophisticated

Nurit Bird-David's fieldwork with the hunter-gatherer *Nayaka* 'tribe' provides the rich ethnographic material for her rather trenchant critique in the Journal *Current Anthropology,* of the notion of animism being labelled as both a 'simple religion' and as a 'failed epistemology.' The *kattu* or forest dwelling Nayaka who opportunistically practise both nomadism and

sedentism in South India, are part of the Dravidian 'stock' of people. As a descendant of South Indian Dravidian extraction myself, I would trace some distant (yet *not* unilineal) lineage back to the Dravidian group. Bird-David's re-understanding and discussion of animism as relational epistemology, and my own contemporary lived experience and memories of aspects of animistic thought and behaviour, prompt my engagement with Bird-David's exceptional discussion.

The accusation (in much of early anthropological work) of *any* religion being *primitive*, and of animism (even in *recent* anthropological and sociological writings) being but a *primitive* form of religious understanding and articulation infuriates me on so many levels. The word 'primitive' is one that featured in much of early anthropological writings and the work of colonial missionaries on which much of the early 'armchair'[8] anthropology was based and is not considered appropriate in these contexts. As a scholar with roots in Comparative Religion, this kind of scaffold-type cataloguing of people's realities, smacks to me, of cultural imperialism. As someone who sees herself as something of a feminist, this kind of labelling screams of a Foucauldian taxonomic 'disciplining' of the religious realities of marginalized groups. And as an academic who is intellectually sustained within contemporary anthropology, that kind of classification is scorned as hegemonic control. To me it is not so much a matter of identifying a semantic or labelling alternative, as a simple matter of strongly disregarding pejorative and heavy connotative labels such as '*primitive*'.

This essay then is an opportunity to critically engage with some of the points that Bird-David raises in her paper. It is also an opportunity to visit and ethnographically engage with certain animistic practices in the South African context. Ultimately, it is a modest contribution at revisiting some of the ideas in animism and what it may offer to contemporary ways of relating to the environment in a more relational way. Nurit Bird-David herself journeys us through a retrospective anthropological discussion and intellectual genealogy of 'animism' in her essay. She discusses 'animism' from the time of its inception as a *concept* into the vocabulary of the early anthropologist Edward Burnet Tylor, in his 1871 work *Primitive Culture,* to the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim, the later structuralist-anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss (with his related work on totemism) and Evans-Pritchard (with his work in Azande magic). She asserts that the

[8]'Armchair' anthropology is of course a reference to the so-called ethnographic writings of the early anthropologists who had spent no actual time in the field.

labelling of animism as a *religiously primitive* way of refracting and understanding the environment, was largely due to seeing 'animism,' both conceptually and behaviourally, through so called modernist lens. She points out that Tylor, "[O]ffered a situated perspective, limited by the time's ethnography and theory, and [as such] it should be studied in its context."[9]

I am in agreement with her thesis that animism presents the seeds of the possibility of conceptualizing and articulating a particular, relational way of looking at, and *being with* the environment. I am, of course, cognizant that there are heterogeneous animistic beliefs that are clearly demonstrated by the rich diversity of old and more recent ethnographic data, such as the fieldwork of Morten Pederson.[10] Bird-David's discussion is itself an application of the theory of animism within the ethnographic reality and understandings of *what exists* for Nayaka people in the context of particular villages in South India.[11] This paper attempts to probe further the possibility of a conversation between animism and contemporary relationality to the world. But what exactly is animism?

3. On Animism

Animistic beliefs, which are pan Asian and also part of the early religious understanding of many early North and South American communities, is embedded in the tapestry of the highly polysemic cultural and intellectual religious milieu of India, and in turn the Hindu diasporic communities, having reached by now the far reaches of Africa. In contemporary India, animistic beliefs sit comfortably alongside more seductive sounding, intellectually and religiously, notions of pantheism and monotheism. In etymological terms the word traces back to the Latin word *animismus* (as expounded by the German scholar Georg E. Stahl), and entered English currency in the work of the anthropologist, Edward Burnet Tylor.

In a volume of *Folklore* dated 1892(!), Stuart-Glennie describes 'animism' as an animation of nature by "souls."[12] The much (much!) more

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[9]Bird-David, "'*Animism*' Revisited," 70.

[10]Morten A. Pedersen, "Totemism, Animism and North Asian Indigenous Ontologies," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7, 3 (2000), 411-427, 411.

[11]Martin D. Stringer, "Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of Our Discipline," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 5, 4, 1999, 541-555, 553.

[12]J. S. Stuart-Glennie, "Queries as to Dr. Tylor's Views on Animism," *Folklore*, 3, 3, 1892, 289-307, 290.

recent paper by Stewart Guthrie[13] in *Current Anthropology* in the year 2000, is written a year after Bird-David's paper in 1999 and is entitled "On Animism." This paper, which is in part a response to Nurit Bird-David, accuses her of conflating understandings of the concept of animism and her unilineal presentation of Western (especially anthropological) discussions of animism.

Guthries's reading of animism, which he notes as being in current currency, is that of attributing "spirits to natural phenomena such as stones and trees."[14] Guthrie does admit (crucially one adds) that this is a form of religion, while Morten Pederson refers to animism, alongside totemism as analytic categories to be as part of the registry of "indigenous ontologies,"[15] within the repertoire of religious understandings. Pederson explains ontology in simple philosophic sense "as theories or understandings about what exists."[16] It is not the focus of this essay to venture into the contested terrain of what *religion* is, even within anthropological frameworks, because much like the notion of 'culture' there are a plethora of functionalist and structural, interpretative and symbolic, and constructivist and operational understandings of religion. Martin Springer in his essay "Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of our Discipline" states that "What is important for Tylor is that people think in terms of entities that are beyond empirical study (for which Tylor uses the shorthand of 'Spiritual Beings') and subsequently modify their behaviour in such a way, as to take these non empirical entities into account."[17] The infancy that Springer is referring here is of course to that of the disciplinary infancy of anthropology which formed the early repository of all our formulations about animism within the body of 'theories on religion.'

4. On Relationality

Both relationality or said differently, both *relativism* and *relationalism* are informed by postmodernism, while notions of relationalism are seen as also being synchronous with the landscape of religious beliefs and articulation. Relationality itself can be distinguished as 'strong' and 'weak.' 'Strong' or ontological relationality speaks to a mutually

[13]Stewart Guthrie, "On Animism," *Current Anthropology* 41, 1 (2000), 106-107.
[14]Guthrie, "On Animism," 106.
[15]Pedersen, "Totemism, Animism and North Asian Indigenous Ontologies," 411.
[16]Pedersen, "Totemism, Animism and North Asian Indigenous Ontologies," 413.
[17]Stringer, "Rethinking Animism," 552.

constitutive relation. Identity is thus simultaneously individual, as a unique nexus of relations, and communal, because according to this perspective, 'things' have a shared being.[18]

Bauwens tells us that relational frameworks yield a "shared being," unique and mutually constituted nexus of situational and interpersonal contexts. Relational frameworks imply that we are, most vitally, already in community of beings, and must live this ontological relationality and social space as a 'space of relations.'[19] I have written elsewhere that this perspective, which speaks to a sense of interconnected-ness of everything, also puts the emphasis on *relationships* as being constitutive of social reality.[20] It was the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown who reminded us that "The human being as a person is a complex of social relationships."[21]

All of this sounds wonderfully enticing in the context of communality of 'people.' Discussions of relationality however, are complicated, or made all the more complex when we are referring relatedness to inanimate 'things,' like stones and mountains, 'things' that one does not usually think as being endowed with a "life or will," a "soul"[22] or "spirit."[23]

5. 'Animism' Revisited: *Relating to* the Environment

As pointed out, the impetus for engaging with the Bird-David's work is her examination of animism in the context of what such an understanding of the environment may bring to an epistemology of relationality. Especially exciting is the idea of bringing a so called 'old' understanding of the environment into contemporary ecological perception. According to Stringer, Bird-David views "animism not so much as a religion as an approach to the world."[24] Personally, for me, whether she views animism

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[18]Slife, Brent D. "Modern and Postmodern Value," Values in Christian Families: Do They Come from Unrecognized Idols? *Brigham Young University Studies*, 38, 2, 2002, 117 - 147. www.brentdslife.com//FamilyvaluesandRelationality.pdf. Online Accessed 25/10/2010.

[19]Michel Bauwens, "Introduction on Individuality, Relationality, and Collectivity: Primacy of Relationality" (2006) at p2pfoundation.net/Introduction_on_Individuality, Relationality,_and_Collectivity. Online Accessed 25/10/2010.

[20]See Naidu Maheshvari, "Relationality as an Ethical Resource," in *Journal of Dharma* 35, 4 (2010), 355-368.

[21]A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*, New York: Free Press, 1952, 21.

[22]E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, London: John Murray, 1871, 21.

[23]E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: University Press, 1965, 25.

[24]Stringer, "Rethinking Animism," 553.

in the context of her ethnographic field community, as *either* a religion *or* an approach to the world, is something of a moot point and is not in itself a concern. For within the context of the multivariant texture and multiple traditions that go by the generic label of *Hinduism*, the Hindu religion is very much, a way of life *and* an approach to the world. In a short comment-type paper, Guthrie et al.[25] claim that anthropomorphism or the interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics is commonplace in everyday mundane life, and universal in religion. It is especially evident in the Hindu traditions. According to Stringer,

> [T]he animistic approach, as represented by the people Bird-David studied, is based on the need to establish relationships beyond the human realm. Bird-David actually provides a very sophisticated and interesting discussion of the way in which relatedness is understood. She shows how this concept of relatedness easily can, and in some sense must, be seen to expand beyond the human realm to the natural and physical world.[26]

Thus, what is of importance here is that the concept of animism (contested as it may be and as heterogeneously understood within ethnographic examples) offers us a way of relating to the environment and to 'things' within the environment as if they were endowed with something animate.

6. Bird-David's Fieldwork with the Nayaka

The excerpt below is an example of Bird-David's ethnographic account of fieldwork with the egalitarian hunter-gatherer community of the Nayaka. While the Nayaka ethnography presents animistic beliefs in 'spirit beings' or *devaru*, ascribed to things such as stones as well as animals, the following is specific reference to the *devaru* seen in the form of stones.

> For example, one Nayaka woman, Devi (age 40), pointed to a particular stone standing next to several other similar stones on a small mud platform when suddenly "this *devaru* came towards her." Another man, Atti-Mathen (age 70), pointed to a stone standing next to the aforementioned one and said that his sister-in law had been sitting under a tree, resting during a foray, when suddenly "this *devaru* jumped onto her lap." The two women had brought the stone *devaru* back to their places "to live" with them. The particular

[25]Stewart Guthrie, Joseph Agassi, et al., "A Cognitive Theory of Religion [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology*, 21. 2, 1980, 181-203, 181.

[26]Stringer, "Rethinking Animism," 553.

> stones were *devaru* as they ''came towards'' and ''jumped on'' Nayaka. The many other stones in the area were not *devaru* but simply stones.[27]

This short excerpt gives us some insight as to how these stones are perceived by the Nayaka. Their behaviour towards these particular stones shows the recognition of a 'something,' a 'being' with a personality residing in the stone, and the stone is literally invited into their home space, and as Bird-David describes it, where the Nayaka accept the stone-*devaru* into fellowship. As Bird-David explains, to the Nayaka, the *devaru* are not 'spirits' nor are they 'supernatural beings.' David Bowen[28] points out that in Bird-David's "alternative approach," which is a reference to her particular exegete, the practical experience of the Nayaka, gives rise to animistic assumptions because, the understanding is that cognitive skills have developed in large part as aids to social interaction. This makes sense within the framework of Bird-David's discussion, where in reference to the *devaru*-stones, she tells us that regular engagement with these entities, results in a growing knowledge of their tendencies and quirks, and prompts the Nayaka into accepting them into fellowship. That entity, even if it is the wind or a tree, or in this case, a 'stone,' appears to reveal a sense of self through what becomes, for the human participant, at any rate, an ongoing conversation.[29]

'Animism' speaks of the recognition of a 'soul,' (or a 'personality' or 'relatedness') to that which empirically does not have one.[30] Bird-David tells us that relational epistemologies are performative, in the sense that their significance hinges on what they *do* rather than on what they represent. This means that they help position us in situations of relatedness, rather than merely represent a sense of relatedness or interconnectivity. In the vocabulary of the poststructuralist Judith Butler,[31] performativity could be understood as a kind of re-iterative act that helps to engender a 'static' understanding, in this case of the 'soul.' However, while to the social scientist this may be a kind of imputing and

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[27]Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited," 74.

[28]David Bowen, "When Stones Come to Life," http://findarticles.com /p/articles/mi_m1200/is_23_155/ai_55017618/pg_2/, online accessed 28/05/2011.

[29]Bowen, "When Stones come to Life," online accessed 28/05/2011.

[30]Stringer, "Rethinking Animism," 555.

[31]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (*Subversive Bodily Acts, IV Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions*), New York: Routledge, 1990, 179.

performativity in creating fictive realities, my understanding is that within the frame of emic understandings, the soul is understood as (already) residing in the object, and is not fictively imputed, but rather recognised and grasped as a 'reality' by the people. In other words the existential boundary between empirical *some*-things, and empirical *no*-things, is rendered permeable.

7. 'Animistic' Behaviour Revisited: Some Examples from South Africa

Presented below are some parts of the narratives of twelve South Indian (Dravidian) Tamil-speaking Hindu grandmothers[32] living in South Africa. These elderly participants, all over the age of seventy five, were approached, having been identified through family and friends. They were grandmothers, an early generation of practicing Hindus, who although part of the wider South African Neo-Hindu monotheistic or single-god tradition, also carried with them their 'older'[33] religious repertoire of beliefs and behaviours, aspects of 'village' Hinduism. Indeed, while engaged in doing Masters field-work in villages near the South Indian city of Madurai, I was privileged enough to visit many rural homes outside Madurai where more often than not, a simple 'anointed stone,' appeared to occupy the central shrine space.

These beliefs and indigenous practices would have been in turn, passed down to the grandmothers from their own mothers and fathers who would have arrived in South Africa as part of the groups of indentured Hindu Indians. These religious practices would have looked to an outsider, as mere worship of plants, trees and stones. They are however, rich examples of what we would refer to as animism within the context of this essay.

I had the fortunate opportunity to visit with these elderly participants and enter their sacred shrine spaces, and in some instances observe their ritualized 'bathing' of their 'sacred stones.' For all twelve elders had in their local South African home-shrines, some stone-like object. They would bathe and ritually anoint that stone, much in the vein of what I had

[32]The choice of female participants is not to suggest that male elders or grandfathers would not share these so called animistic practices. It just that the sampling is a throwback to my own memoried ritual times with my grandmother. Also more often than not, it is the female elder that is in charge of the sacred space at home.

[33]By 'older' I am referring here to aspects of what has been labeled as indigenous, or the "Little Tradition,' the non-*Sanskritic*, non-*brahmanic* parts of the polysemic Hindu religion. Animism is considered an integral part of village or indigenous Hindu belief and practice.

done with my own grandmother a few decades ago. This anointed 'stone' would be placed alongside the more popular figures of sculpted Hindu Gods. Unlike the generation of younger practicing Hindus, their children and grandchildren, who were more often than not, so called modern Hindus, and monotheistic in their approach, these elders carried and practiced a richly textured Hinduism that combined elements of both indigenous beliefs and Neo-Hindu beliefs about the world. This was the rationale behind approaching this particular small purposive sample of participants of *ammas* or mothers. Although some of the grandmothers also offered 'worship' (or what appears as worship to the outsider) to plants and trees, the aspect I focused on here was the ritualized activity with a 'stone.'

The elders/mothers spoke to me in part English and part Tamil, slipping seamlessly from one language to another. Fortunately I was comfortably conversant in Tamil, having grown up hearing both my mother and grandmother speaking the language to me. The narratives also attempt to capture answers to questions posed as to 'what' the stone was to them' and how they 'felt' in ritually preparing the 'stone.' Below are some excerpted and shortened parts of longer narratives from five of the twelve grandmothers interviewed. The names used here, with their permission, are shortened versions of much longer typically South Indian names.

Valli-amma:

> Every Friday I get up early and bathe and get ready to make my outside temple clean. I make the floor clean and sweep. I dust the *murtis* [sculpted images]...wash the *Amman*, [referring to the stone] and put the ashes and *kungum* [vermillion]. I like doing this...No there is no difference... it is not a stone you see... it is the Mother inside [to my questions about the stone]. It's a nice feeling... I feel close to *Amman* [Mother Goddess] and I fell close to everything, all people and also plants and trees... to everything...

Pushpa-ma:

> This stone has been in my family a long, long time. I don't treat it like a stone you see. It got the god's spirit inside. I feel close and at one with that spirit when I close my eyes in front of it.
>
> Dear child [to my probing] I don't know how to explain ... I don't know the full meaning ... but it is our religion ... it is what my mother taught me and what her mother taught her...

Devi-amma: (Devi-amma was one of the elders who was much more comfortable with English and who seemed to have a more advanced level of secondary schooling).

> This is the way I understand it. I worship my *ishta devata* Shiva [referring to the favoured aspect of her monotheistic God in the form of Shiva]...but I also offer worship at my Tulsi tree and my *kallu* [stone]... to me it is not a mere stone. It is also a house for the presence of God...that is how I understand it... but I know that to my mother... this was a stone that housed not a God but a spirit... she believed in many spirits ... not evil spirits but spirits like spirit energies...It's not so old fashioned if you think about it...after all our religion does teach us that there is life in all things, living and non living. I don't think my mother was backward ... After all every time you put the TV, you are always hearing about how we should respect the things in our environment... just like we respect people...seeing 'something' in that stone reminds us to respect the things in our environment ... you know our forefathers were very wise ... and although I feel silly to tell my daughter ... I can tell you ... sometimes when I am very quiet ... I can feel oneness with the sacred stone...

Sargouna-amma:

> I don't know why you want to know all this ... but it is good for me to talk about prayer and things ... oh you want to know about that one [pointing to the stone].That's Mother's child [referring to the Mother Goddess]... it's not just a stone ... just like us the other things in the world are also her children. I offer prayers to my Tulsi tree and my *kallu* [stone]... it reminds me that we are all God's children ...

Munniamma:

> It's like this you see ... we know God is everywhere ... well God is in the stone too ... isn't that right? I'm not worshiping all the stones outside my house ... those stones have God's energy in them too ... but this one is special because I put it aside and I show that I recognize inside it ... God's power and soul ... My daughter does not think of it like this ... she lets me keep my sacred stone ... but she does not understand ... and my grandchildren ... I think they think what I do does not make sense ... they say it is not for them ... [this is a reference to the later generationed diasporic Hindus who had moved towards Neo-Hinduism and quite often congregational worship or *satsang*]... but it makes sense to me and my husband, just

like it made sense to my parents and their parents before that. The world has changed too much ... we need things that remind us to take care of all the living and not living things around us ...

8. Animism Stories and Narrative Analysis

These stories shed vital light on the practice of what we would term as elements of animistic behaviour. Narrative analysis, however, quite importantly, does not consider narratives as stories that convey a set of facts about the world, and is not primarily interested in whether stories are 'true.' Rather narrative analysis views narratives, as interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and their worlds, to themselves and to others. This kind of analysis sees narratives or stories as linking the past to the present.[34] This form of qualitative scrutiny is also particularly apposite given that much of what we as researchers receive in interview accounts, are likely to be 'storied,' in other words received in narrative form. Also with this technique, in most instances the researcher says very little, acting primarily as an attentive listener, which was especially suited to this sample group.

Using narrative analysis, we see that particular themes or scripts emerge in the stories that these elderly *ammas* 'tell.' Perhaps it is also prudent to point out that in this analysis, I am not so much concerned with a Geertzian approach, in other words looking for what it (ritualized activity towards a stone) *means* for the elders, in as much as what it *does* for them. This is because in listening to their narratives, it is easy to discern that there is immense dissimilarity in how they understand the meaning of the stone and the meaning of what they are doing. Part of this difference can be inferred to the fact that, although they were all south Indian and Tamil-speaking, they would trace lineage back to different south Indian groups in India. And in the new space, that of diasporic home space of South Africa, they were living among different generations of Hindu family members with a diffused understanding and practice of contemporary Hinduism/s. There is thus, quite understandably perhaps, for them something of a diverse understanding of *what* the stone was.

There is however, great similarity in the common performative aspect at play here. The grandmothers 'know,' on some level, what the stone *does* for them i.e. connecting them to something beyond. They 'know' that the stone, in housing (according to their different exegete) a 'power,' or 'soul,' in turn connects them to something empirically beyond

[34]Tim May, ed., *Qualitative Research in Action*, London: Sage Books, 2002.

their grasp. The re-iterative action of weekly bathing and anointing keeps this link perpetually refreshed so to speak. Watching some of the ammas in this reiterative action was quite a special treat as it was clearly discernable in their facial expression and bodily demeanour, the importance of this act and the happiness they derived from it. Many spoke of the how they felt while engaged in this act, referring to feeling a connection with the things in nature that were not necessarily human. It seemed to me that their experience of the 'power' in the stone acted as a conduit that they used to remind them of their connection or related-ness to the environment.

It is to be noted that these stones are not anything like the stone *devaru* from the ethnographic context of Bird-David, and represent the heteroglossic reality of different expressions of animistic understandings and practices. Bird-David points out in her reply to critics, that presenting Nayaka animistic practices as a particular cultural and indigenous 'way of knowing' or epistemology, is not to 'blur the difference between religious and scientific knowledge' but rather to possibly re-assign some of these indigenous practices from a pigeon-holed understanding of being a form of primitive religion, and perhaps placing it alongside some contemporary understandings of environmental sensitivity and consciousness. This is precisely the case with the examples from our small sample of grandmother participants. It is not to declare that they had a 'knowing' that was superior to scientific knowing, but rather to bring their experiences of the 'life' in the inanimate stone into some form of contemporary discussion. Narratives often have a point which frequently takes the form of a moral message. This could be the embedded message in Devi-amma and Munniama's stories about 'respecting' the 'things' in the environment.

Bird-David tells us that for the Nayaka, keeping the conversation on-going is imperative, or the *devaru* will complain. This is perhaps a reminder that there needs to be an on-going and continued fellowship between 'person' and (aspects of) the 'environment.' Clearly the grandmothers in my sample are 'keeping the conversation on-going' by their weekly ritualized practice. They were in a sense experiencing relations to 'things' as if they were ecological relations to people. From what they shared, they were on some level in communion with non-human things, in this instances their sacred *kallu* or stones. Narrative theory argues that the social world is itself 'storied' and that narrative is a key means through which people produce an identity. These elderly grandmothers already had a narrative of self and religion, which included elements of veneration, respect and ritual towards an inanimate object (the

stone). Tim Ingold suggests that human sociability was engendered by cognitive skills that were *ecologically* biased.[35] According to him, this would provide an even stronger case for the essential validity of animism.

The stories that the grandmothers shared varied, and show up discontinuities in that some seemed to be describing 'strong' relationality, and others somewhat 'weaker' relationality. However, narrative analysis clearly reveals the underlying spine of continuity in that they all spoke '*relationally*' about the environment, almost as if they experienced themselves in some kind of fellowship with the environment. This pointed back to what Nurit-David had termed as a relational epistemology that engendered both a knowing and feeling of fellowship. All of the *ammas* ignored what many take for granted, an axiomatic boundary between human and non-human. Therein lay, for me, the fragments of an indigenous discourse that collapsed the structural and seemingly impermeable boundary between person and non-person, or said differently, nature and culture. And none of the grandmothers for a moment doubted their beliefs and practices as being erroneous (even if they recognised that their family might). Instead the animistic beliefs and practices reminds them that as a person, they are in a 'composite relationship,' similar to the Nayaka and their understanding of their place in the world. It also echoes, in some ways, the work on 'perspectivism' by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. He reminds us that Amerindian thought "is a specific type of worldview that forces us to take as a starting point, an extended notion of the human: a notion that comprises a series of beings, including various types of animals, spirits and materials."[36] This extended notion of the human makes much sense to me. Redman et.al also point out that it is no longer defensible to study ecological and social systems in alienation from one another as humans are an integral part of virtually all ecosystems.[37] This kind of thinking seeks to decolonize thought from a structuralist and separatist stronghold.

All the *ammas* ascribed their own relational way of understanding the environment *to their religion*. Their religion in turn was a composite of

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[35]Tim Ingold, *Key Debates in Anthropology*, London: Routledge, 1996.

[36]Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, 3 (1998), 469-488.

[37]Charles L. Redman, J. Morgan Grove, Lauren H. Kuby, "Integrating Social Science into the Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) Network: Social Dimensions of Ecological Change and Ecological Dimensions of Social Change," *Ecosystems* 7, 2 (2004), 161-171.

early indigenous animistic beliefs and practices as well as later Hindu ritual and philosophical beliefs. There is much in *brahmanic* Hinduism that points philosophically to the non duality of the world, or Advaita tenets. However, these teachings while known to the grandmothers had less of a performative aspect for them. By this I mean that they were philosophical tenets that the grandmothers 'knew,' but did not see as being experientially played out for them. Rather it was to the indigenous animistic beliefs that they turned to when they spoke about being connected to the environment. One adds that while the Advaita philosophy of Sankara and his followers expounded an epistemologically sophisticated system, it was a system of *a-dvaita*, or not-two. Relationality, necessarily presupposes a 'two,' or subject-object, albeit in a permeable relationship or fellowship.

Although it may sound somewhat clichéd, it is very possible that that the so called 'indigenous peoples' or pre-industrial societies were uniquely positioned in their close and long-standing environmental relationships[38] and able to retain more immediate engagement with the natural environment. This statement is of course, in itself not new. What I am developing and opening up for further discussion here, is the point that animism, and animistic beliefs and practices, can move us into new directions in which we can begin to perceive and relate to the environment.

Conrad Kottak points out that the move from what was termed old ecology, with its parochial approach to the environment has been replaced by a new ecology that is open to entering into dialogue with alternate operational models of understanding the world, and relationship to things in the world. Kottak states rather tellingly, that "older ecologies have been remiss in their narrowness and partial and temporal horizons," while "the new ecological anthropology is located at the intersection of global, national, regional, and local systems, studying the outcome of the interaction of multiple levels and multiple factors."[39]

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[38]Conrad P. Kottak, "The New Ecological Anthropology," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 101, 1 (1999), 23-35, 23. Nancy J. Turner, Marianne Boelscher Ignace, Ronald Ignace, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom of Aboriginal Peoples," *British Columbia Ecological Applications* 10, 5 (2000), 1275-1287.

[39]Kottak, "The New Ecological Anthropology," 23.

9. Conclusion

The work of Turner et al. on cultural 'edges' is inspiring. These edges or cultural transitional zones are the spaces where converging cultures interact and are rich in diverse cultural traits, showing cultural features of each of the contributing peoples.[40] Following this cue, I would like to propose 'perspectival edges.' This would be the edge or contact point where two perspectives, in this case the perspective of animism and the perspective of a post-Cartesian, more *relational* self, 'meet.' These would be the places and spaces where insights and practices can be carried across from animism into contemporary notions of a 'self' that is experienced as being related to the environment.

In Nurit-Bird's ethnographic work with the animism-practicing Nayaka, the *devaru* (stones) are objectifications of a composite relationship. The Nayaka composite personhood or self is constitutive of sharing relationships reproduced by the Nayaka *with* aspects of their environment. In my narrative analysis with the stories shared by the grandmothers, it was also clear that they had on some level, objectified their relationship with the environment, or that which was beyond the empirical realm, through their reiterated ritual acts with their sacred stones. And similar to the Nayaka, they were also behaving relationally to the environment, and understood themselves as being in relational frameworks. Relational frameworks imply a community of beings in a social space as a 'space of relations.' While this is an unconscious and natural part of the religio-cultural make-up of the Nayaka, and even in some ways, that of our South African grandmothers, it is suggested that this religious thinking and behaving can be consciously carried into a more environmentally aware thinking and behaving. A more eco sensitive self is aware of a social space that is shared by the seemingly non human parts of the environment as being animated or enlivened. The social space referred to here is in turn enhanced at the 'perspectival edge.' It is suggested that it is this experience of relationality and of 'social relations' that is able to create the psychological and spiritual 'environment' able to engender more conscious and sensitive 'relational' behaviour from us, towards the physical environment.

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[40]Nancy J. Turner, Iain J. Davidson-Hunt, Michael O'Flaherty, "Living on the Edge: Ecological and Cultural Edges as Sources of Diversity for Social-Ecological Resilience," *Human Ecology*, 31. 3, 2003, 439-461.

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BEING IN HARMONY
Biblical Vision of Interconnected Existence

Saji Mathew Kanayankal♦

1. Introduction

The current "environmental crisis" is not simply a calamity or disaster or a crisis of certain particular phenomenon in the world. It is, rather, a fundamental deterioration of the integrity and comprehensiveness of the total rhythmic, interdependence and coherent flow of the entire ecosystem. The root of this crisis remains on the inability of the human being to place him/her self within a broadly conceived ecological context. Therefore, in search for a plausible response to environmental crisis, we have to retrieve or reconsider different premises on human superiority and various hypotheses – philosophical, theological, and religious – on his/her existence and role in the universe. In this pursuit, the religious symbols, traditions and practises of Christianity have also been challenged. Indeed, at times the Christian world view and theology were accused of despotic views on nature resulting in environmental crisis.[1] However, the Christian theology has undergone radical changes during the past forty years and our understanding on the human being and his/her relationship with the rest of creation has changed. The Christian theology finds its rationale for existence in creation, which is also characterised as the distinctive feature of Christian integrity and identity. The whole novelty of the Christian conception of creation consists on a 'contingent beginning' of the world. Accordingly, what might not have existed at all does actually and really exist by the supreme and inscrutable Will. The foundational fiat

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[1]Lynn White Jr. accused Christianity as the cause of the entire world's environmental problem. According to him, Christianity, being the most anthropocentric religion, by using creation theology, has de-divinized and de-sacralized the nature. See, Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995, 25-35. (This article is originally published in *Science* 155, 1967, 1203-7). There followed a lot of discussions and debates on the basis of this article.

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claims that the creation is a free, but ultimate act of God. This doctrine of creation, which offers a comprehensive vision that encompasses the manifold of humanity, earth and God, also plays a fundamental role in helping us to form the origin, purpose and goal of life. Though there is more than one narrative in the Bible on creation, this article concentrates on the ecological significance of the story of creation narrated in the first chapter of Genesis.[2]

2. The Biblical Vision of Creation

The first, though not the oldest, but the most popular creation story in the Bible is narrated in the form of a liturgical hymn (Genesis 1:1-2:4a), which describes the origin of the world in a seven days' scheme. In comparison with the different similar Ancient Near Eastern traditions of the biblical time, this narrative keeps its uniqueness with its monotheism and picturizes God as the creator of the 'heavens and the earth.' The conjugation of these two different terminologies – 'heavens and the earth'– which is a way of saying that "God is responsible for all observable cosmic phenomena,"[3] provides a special and condensed theological insight and relates God with the entire reality.[4] Accordingly God is a universal being and human beings cannot limit the compatibility of the creator into their own short milieu. This idea is presented in the form of a story, with a beginning and an end.

3. From Chaos to Order

The liturgical hymn of creation, with which the book of Genesis opens, begins with the description of a chaotic situation of an absolute nothingness. It describes: "In the beginning when God created the heavens

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[2]The Bible contains quite different cosmogonies in Genesis, Proverbs, Job, Psalms and Second Isaiah. The early biblical treatments of creation share the narrative and dramatic forms of ancient myths. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, "Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 24, Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992, 10 gives a detailed discussion on the different creation narratives in the Biblical tradition. Among the two narratives of on creation in the book of Genesis, the Yahwistic tradition (Genesis 2:4b-25) is regarded as the ancient one.

[3]Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 36.

[4]Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, *The Book of Life: Biblical Answers to Existential Questions*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 41, Leuven: Peeters Press, 2009, 122.

and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of deep..." (Genesis 1:1-2). In the biblical vision, 'formless void' (*tohu wabohu*), is a term to denote the initial ambiguous and indefinable situation of meaninglessness and no-thingness. It is a way of explaining the 'void and vacancy' or the 'absolute nothingness,' prior to creation, – a pre-developed or undeveloped chaotic and unbearable state, where meaningful life was impossible, over which an awesome wind was sweeping.[5] God, as the creator, begins his activity in this initial chaotic and void state and through the parallel works of '*opus separationis*' and '*opus ornatus*' (separation and ornamentation) he brought out order, stability, harmony and life into it. Theologically, this is understood as an articulation of the absolute beginning of the universe as well as an expression of the sovereign power of God.

The creation, separation and the ordering of the universe, reveals a divine intention which reflects the wisdom, goodness and ordering hand of God the creator. "The creation is internally structured, ordered in the way it is," asserts Richard L. Fern, "reflects God's purpose in creating a world radically other than himself."[6] The primary purpose of separation is to bring order into the chaotic situation. The three acts of separation – from unformed to form, above to below, and water to dry land – is a gradual progress towards harmonisation of cosmos.[7] The first act of separation is the division of time, whereas the last two separations are the arrangements

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[5]The biblical scholars suggest different meanings such as desert, nothingness, devastation, waste, uselessness, groundless claim, uninhabitable chaos, unformed and void, hodgepodge and mish-mash to the word '*tohu wabohu*.' It is also seen as sinister, nihilating, demonic powers, but, the forces related to life, order, goodness and truth. See, Bernhard W. Anderson, "A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story," in *Canon and Authority*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, 156; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, 1st Fortress Press ed., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 104. William P. Brown, *Structure, Role and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3*, ed. David L. Peterson, Dissertation Series, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993, 74; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963, 47.

[6]Richard L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 141.

[7]It is to be noted that the author of the Priestly creation narrative speaks of three separations, such as, the separation of light and darkness (Genesis 1:4), the separation of water above and water below (Genesis 1:6) and the separation of the water below and the dry land (Genesis 1:9).

of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the created order.[8] The further activities of creation must be understood in this background. As Jürgen Moltmann observes, "[t]hrough the separation the works of his [God's] creation acquire identifiable form, rhythm and symmetry."[9] The first phase of creation ends on the third day with the appearance of vegetation. Here the purpose of the transformation of primeval chaotic situation becomes clearer. All initial elements of creation intend to prepare a setting of life in the universe. Thus, at the end of creation, the world is no more a place of 'chaos full of opposing forces,' nor is there the domination primeval darkness or watery abbeys. The formlessness and deserted situation of the beginning has been transformed under the creative will of God, and a dynamic and lively space came into being. With the establishment of the order in the creation, the primary chaos disappeared. Jose Morales asserts:

> The word of God calls the world ... into being; God acts directly. Step by step, bringing order out of chaos. Even the structure of the creation account shows the sacred writer's interest in the idea of order. Creation is set into a seven–day framework. Each work recounted according to the same plan. Each begins with a divine word, there follows confirmation formula, the writer then describes the work done and gives a formula of approval. There is rhythmic and gradual ascent in the text culminating with the creation of man and woman.[10]

The author of the Priestly creation narrative depicts a God, who creates every creature individually with its own particular task and duties and assigns a proper place to it. By this action, everyone receives its own definite role in the created universe. The initial works of separation are followed by the placement of the beings in accordance with their proper place and time; the day and night by sun, moon and stars; sky and sea by birds and fish; earth by animals, plants and finally by human beings respectively. Each one is created according to its kind, and placed according to its character in its own suitable environment. All created beings are also assigned with their own tasks and functions.

Thus, at the end of the acts of creation, the formlessness and emptiness of the early stage is transformed into a new sphere and it is filled. This description is not chronological, scientific or historical; it is

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[8]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 119.

[9]Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1992, 73.

[10]Jose Morales, *Creation Theology*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 17.

cosmological.[11] As Bernard W. Anderson observes, here the creation becomes a divinely decreed order within which each creature accomplishes the creator's will. Through the commandment of the creator, the creatures came into being with their particular nature and mission,[12] and no being comes into existence in its own way, but with the pronouncement of the word of God. In this well-planned and systematized universe, no created being is independent in its own self, for the creatures carry their own particular mission intended by the creator. The heavenly bodies, the sun and moon are neither absolute powers nor independent in themselves, but are only servants continuing the functions designated by God. Thus, in contrast to the chaos and nothingness at the beginning, the story ends with a picture of a dynamic state, where in all creatures exist in mutual relationship and communion.

4. Goodness and Value of Creation

According to the Priestly creation narrative, everything was brought into existence in a well-ordered scheme, and at each step of creation, the creator paused to survey his work. After every creative act, he assured that what he had done was 'good' and at the finale of creation, the whole grand design was pronounced 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). This declaration, as Rolf P. Knierim points out, "is a most profound formulation which in essence includes all else that can be said. It cannot be said any better. It is a fundamental theological statement about the world."[13] The appraisal of the creator on the goodness of creation signifies his unique intention of creatures. This assumption expresses appreciation for the intrinsic value of each and every creature, plant and planetary process, not only for the beginning of creation, but also for the entire time. Realities have come into existence through the act of God and are under his control through separation and ordering, hence are good. Therefore, the goodness ascribed to the creatures is not an outcome, which is away from the creator; rather it is the expression of his being itself.[14] Since God had assured that his

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[11]Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1984, 69-70.

[12]Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 30-31.

[13]Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 199.

[14]Bernard F. Batto, "Creation Theology in Genesis," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, The Catholic Biblical

creation is simply good, no less than perfection, whatever is created is completely satisfying to God in all respect. The Priestly creation narrative attributes intrinsic value to creation and views the creation in its integrity. Therefore, the eco-diversity in the created order, which is the reflection of the being of the creator, is good in itself. The reflection of the wisdom and goodness of God in the ordered universe, however, does not imply that its natural order be 'monastically identified with the being of God.'[15]

Human beings, while accepting God as the creator of the universe realise the rest of creation as God's creatures. As Celia Deane-Drummond opines, "[a]cknowledgement of the creatures of the earth as God's creatures is the first step in affirming their importance and worth."[16] As creatures of God, the value of a being is neither self generated nor independent, rather, it is related to God; it is divinely endowed. Being the generous creator of everything, God has declared that whatever thing he has created is good and thus he values each creation. This 'good' in fact, refers to the ontological goodness of the beings and every creature is made to share the divine goodness. Accordingly, life, whether it is of human or nonhuman, is related to the life giving Spirit of God and therefore, is worthy of respect. The innate goodness and value of each created being signifies that the goodness of creation does not consist of the assessment of human beings and it cannot be counted solely with reference to human desires and interests. As John Hart argues, the intrinsic value of a created being is not anthropogenic and it remains beyond humans' acknowledgement and assignment.[17] The simple fact that the creatures are created gives worth to them. It means, "even if humans are uniquely important in creation, it does not follow that everything in creation is made for us, to be pleasing for us, or that our pleasure is God's chief concern."[18] Thus, according to the Genesis account, the created universe and all beings in it receive their worth not from the usefulness or worth that is articulated by humanity, but from its own value.

Quarterly Monograph Series 24, Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992, 35.

[15]Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 10, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 165.

[16]Celia Deane-Drummond, "Living from the Sabbath: Developing an Ecological Theology in the Context of Biodiversity," *Interface* 7, 1 (2004), 4.

[17]John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006, 124.

[18]Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, Urbano: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 24.

Here we affirm the value of the non-human world in itself, regardless of its usefulness to human beings. The world and its different creation receive its value from the investment of 'God's self,' in it, and everything in creation manifests the divine purpose.[19] The faithful can see and experience God's providence within the natural order as well as within history. Every event in the world and history happens ultimately for the glory of God. In order to value goodness of the created beings, argues Stephen J. Pope, "we must attend to boundaries, accept our limits, engage in self-restraint, respect natural finitude, and strive to conform to, or least cooperate with, the natural pattern of interdependence within which we are immersed."[20] Therefore, human beings cannot see anything in the order of creation as useless, expendable or the created world and the multitude of beings in it as just 'a resource' for their benefit alone. Instead, the earth and its various creatures are to be valued in its own inherent stance.

5. The Biblical Creation: An Opening to the Web of Interconnectedness

The fundamental faith experience of the Bible is expressed in terms of the creatorship of God. This vision of creation underlines and affirms the sovereignty of God, his creatorship and thus the creatureliness of all earthly existing beings. The sovereignty of God functions as the foundation of the interconnectedness between the different spheres of existence as well. The logic is plain: if God is the creator of all creatures, all beings in the created world are related each other *ipso facto*. The interconnectedness and the reciprocal affiliation are the direct outcome of the act of creation which coalesces every created being in the web of mutual dependence on each other towards 'a community of interconnected living things,' affirming the interdependence of every species and every member of every species by a complex web of interrelationships.[21] In the order of creation, each member, 'in being itself' contributes to the whole, and realises its potential that is conducive for the flourishing of life.

This integral relationship of God to creatures is the most fascinating expression in the biblical ecological vision. Though radically other, being immanent in the cosmos and guiding it according to his vision, God is in

[19]Norman Habel, "Key Ecojustice Principles: A Theologia Crucis Perspective," *Ecotheology* 5-6 (1998), 117.

[20]Stephen J. Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 28, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 205.

[21]The Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," in *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Normen C. Habel, The Earth Bible 1, Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000, 44.

constant relation with his creatures. The power of life within humanity and the life giving principle in the whole universe is the power of God. All existing realities in the world primarily depend on God for their existence and then on each other. Therefore, as Ted Peters observes, "dignity is dependent upon the web of interconnectedness that will finally unite all things, upon the anticipated whole of redeemed reality wrought by God whose love for us makes ends rather than means."[22] This interconnectedness and interdependence keep the living as well as the non-living beings from the danger of separatism. Encircled with this web of mutual dependence and relations, no being can exist in the world in isolation or no one is alien in this biotic community. Isolation shows the deficiency of interrelatedness. We, the human beings are what we are, in relation with the different organisms and the processes that makes the life possible on earth.[23] "Each human person in a certain way is a hypostasis of the entire cosmic nature," argues Dumitru Staniloaë, "but he is this only in solidarity with others."[24] This solidarity and interrelatedness prompt us to understand the meaning of 'existence' in terms of 'communication in communion,' – a life "existing in relationship with other people and things."[25] It reminds us, how God, in his goodness and wisdom shaped this universe with the spirit of interconnectedness and mutual dependence. God intended this universe for all his creatures and human being is part of this 'much larger whole.'[26] Since humans are part of the rest of the creation, human lives as well as responsibilities are 'complexly, yet harmoniously intertwined' with lives of many others, persons as well as things.[27] These 'natural resources' are the gift and benevolence of God and our consumption of it demands to recognise his graciousness and to be grateful

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[22]Ted Peters, *God: The World's Future - Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978, 371.

[23]Norman Wirzba, "Introduction: The Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Berkeley, CA: Counter Point, 2002, xiv.

[24]Dumitru Staniloaë, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer, vol. 2, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000, 2.

[25]Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 3.

[26]Edy Korthals Altes, *Spiritual Awakening: The Hidden Key to Peace and Security, Just and Sustainable Economics, a Responsible European Union*, Studies in Spirituality 16, Leuven: Peeters Press, 2008, 37.

[27]Wirzba, "Introduction," xi. According to Wirzba, in nature, more things connect us than distinguish.

to him for the different gifts. It further extrapolates the necessity of respecting the integrity of creation. Our life and existence in the world are dependent upon and linked with many factors and conditions, such as the climate, the air, the water, etc. Therefore, humans should have a knowledge about 'when to stop' and 'how to use'. However, this concept of interrelatedness should not reduce the identity and uniqueness of human beings. Being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), they have a unique role and responsibility in the order of creation. The biblical tradition has viewed and interpreted this ethical responsibility in terms of human dominion.

6. Human Dominion in Terms of Interrelatedness

Basically, being human is being directed towards others, for human beings are essentially social and communal at the core[28] and they are radically interrelated with and dependent on everything else in the universe. In a vast community of individuals within an ecosystem in which each one depends on others, human beings exist as 'individual beings' with their own uniqueness. The human specificity and distinctiveness are manifested through mutual dependence and relationships, which becomes constitutive to the core of our being. In this web of interrelatedness, one affirms his/her identity and particularity in and through communion, for "a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within relationships."[29] This relationship is theologically explained in association with the concept of '*imago Dei*.' To be created in the image of God is primarily understood in terms of the 'fellowship and communion with God.'[30] "As the image of God on earth," says Jürgen Moltmann, "human being corresponds first of all to the relationship of God to themselves and to the whole creation. The unique calling of the human being is understood 'to be in responsible relationship with God, with each other and with the rest of creation."[31]

This basic nature of the human person, who is 'created in relation' first with God, and then with the rest of creation, is the basis of his/her

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[28]Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989, 67.

[29]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians 4, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997, 105.

[30]Kallistos Ware, "In the Image and Likeness: The Uniqueness of the Human Person," in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection between Body, Mind and Soul*, ed. John T. Chiraban, Westport: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1996, 3.

[31]Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 77.

interconnectedness. As Eberhard Schockenhoff, observes, "the unique dignity which his immediate relationship to God gives the human person is thus displayed in the special commission which he receives for the other beings within creation."[32] At this juncture, the biblical anthropology brings out its uniqueness, in which the existence of the human being is differentiated with their 'relationship with God and other creatures.' These two axes of human relations i.e., as a creature, which is part of the whole creation, but at the same time being clearly distinguished from the rest of creation, define the interrelatedness between human persons and the world.[33] Through the special affinity with the creator, the personhood of the human being is exposed to the different aspects of their external relations. However, the multidimensional facet of human relationship cannot be grasped from externality alone, for it 'follows from their relationship with God.'[34] This innate aspect of relationship provides dynamism and intensity to the human persons while they relate with the rest of creation. It also clearly manifests the twofold dimensions of their existence, i.e., on the one hand, the human being is related with the creator in a special way that the rest of creation is not, on the other hand, she/he is a creature among the rest of creation, a co-inhabitant on earth. The realization of these dual dimensions of human existence makes human beings more authentic in their behaviours especially in the dealings with the created world. While developing an ecological vision, we must give due importance to this fundamental relatedness. Any kind of violation and degradation of nature that diminishes the integrity of creation and threaten the fundamental relationship with the creator and creation will be ultimately an offence against the creator.

7. Towards a Harmonic and Holistic Existence

This integrated existence of human being in communion with nature can further be explained with the concept of 'wholeness.' Nuanced by its very terminology, 'wholeness' is filled with a variety of concepts such as unity, integrity, haleness, totality and so forth. Though the term 'whole' was used since a long time, 'wholeness' as a scientific term came into use only by

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[32]Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity: Universal Ethics in an Historical World*, trans. Brian McNeil, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 234.

[33]Marjorie Keenan, *Care for Creation: Human Activity and the Environment*, Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2000, 28.

[34]Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, 229.

the end of the nineteenth century. Here, I use this term in order to explain the breadth and subtlety of the interrelatedness of human beings with different ecosystems as well as God.[35]

Though 'wholeness' can be explained in terms of 'totalness' or 'entireness,' this is not a single dimensional component; rather, it encompasses the "happenings," "havings," "doings" as well as "be-ings," of a person.[36] Nevertheless, we cannot deduce wholeness either on external realm or on physical good. Whatever things are natural for human beings are not just biological, organic or genetic. It has a wider nuance that includes the 'full range of inclinations' and the 'desires common to rational beings' for 'knowledge, for life in a political community and for union with God.'[37] The description of Wendell Berry in relation to health seems to be plausible for a better explanation of this term. He deciphers its density and solidity by focusing on the convergence of 'health and holiness.' Berry says:

> In that, [the convergence of health and holiness] all the convergences and dependences of Creation are surely implied. Our bodies are also not distinct from the bodies of other people, on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual. They are not distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit. They are not distinct from the earth, the sun and the moon, and the other heavenly bodies.[38]

Therefore, we can neither compartmentalise nor fragment the wholeness of a person from the wholeness of the entire creation; we must "come with all other creatures to the feast of creation."[39]

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[35]My idea of 'wholeness' can be better explained with the German term '*Ganzheitlichkeit*.' With the help of *Ganzheitlichkeit*, I would like to explain it in terms of the relatedness between God, human being and the surrounding nature. It implies that the welfare and well-being of the human being calls for solidarity, mutuality as well as indivisibility of the welfare of entire ecosystem. It includes the dynamic nature of reciprocal interaction between the organism and its various environments. Susanne Sandherr, "Ganzheitlichkeit," *Lexikon der Christichen Ethik* 1, 2003, 584.

[36]Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity*, 188.

[37]Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, 149.

[38]Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Berkeley, CA: Counter Point, 2002, 99.

[39]Berry, "The Body and the Earth," 99.

This holistic vision draws our attention towards the deeper interconnectedness of the entire ecosystem which invites us to value things and gives each existing being its due 'respect' and concern. The individual and social life is nourished and sustained only while one respects the distinctiveness and individuality of each being. However, this approach is neither a 'romantic sacrilization nor moralization' of nature, nor a total negation of technology or science; rather it promotes a reasonable acceptance of the formation of a 'possible better world.' In our effort to materialise a 'better world,' while working for human flourishing, ample emphasis should be given to the benefit of different ecosystems. It must be well balanced in relation to our interdependence within the ecosystem.[40] In order to have a better world, we must confirm the well-being and happiness of our different relations, especially, our relationships with our fellow human beings and nature. Ethically, we can explain it in terms of 'sustainable development,' in which the reciprocal 'striving and thriving' of the social and natural systems are situated together.[41] In this view, the needs of the present and future generations are balanced in a better way.

The core of this 'holistic vision' remains on the practise of moral principles, which aims at the true good of the entire creation. It includes the annihilation of our desire to possess more, to (ab)use or exploit others (persons as well as resources) for individual benefit and to have more, merely for enjoyment or luxurious life. If the advancement of science and technology ignores the multifaceted relatedness of human beings and concentrates on the accumulation of material goods and its consumption, even if it is for the 'benefit of majority,' it will not bring happiness and freedom, nor does it offer true well-being and welfare.[42] Therefore, our idea of wholeness appeals to see realities above their material realm and frame the concept of happiness and welfare in the context of one's right relationship with God, neighbour, him/herself and the earth. A true and genuine welfare consists neither in the progress of material goods and its consumption or maximisation, nor in the construction of great monuments and architects; instead, it does focus on the building up of richer relationships between persons not excluding the creator and different creatures on the earth. In this view, the ecological task of Christian theology is to enhance and enrich the different spheres of relationships that

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[40]Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, 206.

[41]Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, 168.

[42]*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §28.

promote the human and ecological flourishing. It prioritises the human responsibility and its obligation to promote the rights and dignity of all beings in the cosmic community and affirms the intrinsic relationship between the well-being of the individual self and the productivity, diversity, and dynamic stability of the natural world.

8. Conclusion

The Christian view of creation underlines a 'shared existence,' of different beings in the created world. The biological integrity and well-being of an individual depends on the ecological integrity of his/her entire ambience and the well-being of an individual is intrinsically intertwined with the integrity of creation. As a being depending on others and many other living as well as non-living beings and systems, one can neither compartmentalise nor radically separate his/her well-being from the well-being of nature; rather both are integrally interconnected and thus go hand in hand. Hence, in a wider spectrum, the good to human beings and true human interests neither rival the good of other creatures nor threaten the harmony of creation and we can place the human being in their vast order of life in which the good of each individual is to be realised in relation to the whole and each element of the whole in due proportion. We cannot actualise the individual benefit and goodness apart from the common good wherein the environmental sustainability and integrity would become the most essential conditions. Therefore, our moral choices and actions must consider the value and well-being of nature that would promote the welfare of all.

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SYMBOLIC ENACTMENTS AND RITUALIZED CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AMONG PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Vivian Besem Ojong ♦

1. Introduction

This research paper is about the relationship between religious belief, actions and attitudes of Pentecostal Christians towards the environment. Ethnographically positioned, it captures the ritualized and symbolic cognitive beliefs and practices of Pentecostal Christians in South Africa as well as the associated discourses. The paper also offers a discussion of the need to properly understand religion and shifting from text to territory. This requires methodological change of not just studying religion as written text but repositioning ourselves by studying it as a lived phenomenon to be studied through ethnographic accounts. It further explores some resilient Pentecostal belief patterns by showing how the environment is increasingly being seen in ritual terms.

Being a guiding principle of life and a practice of people's spirituality and their belief system[1] religion has come to occupy a central place in human existence. Due to the centrality of religion to human social life, we cannot overlook its analytic power and implications in understanding the environment. Since religion has guidelines for behaviour, it directly or indirectly determines how people relate to the environment and how they construct their worldviews in relation to it. Extensive fieldworks done among Pentecostal Christians in KwaZulu-Natal reveal that, according to their belief, every place (town, city, country) is governed by territorial spirits. These spirits are perceived to live in rivers, mountains, the sea, etc. These environments are believed to be enchanted and according to Pentecostal Christians, it is their responsibility to deliver themselves through aggressive prayers and win the environment for God. For these Christians, the ability to prosper are clear indicators that the environment is being impacted with new energies.

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[1]Lucious Von Fredricco, www.helium.com/ite.

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2. The Research Context

The strategy adopted for this research was participant observation and in-depth interviews. I also did opportunistic interviews whenever a visiting preacher from either Nigeria or Ghana was in KwaZulu-Natal for crusades. Some of the informants indicated that their ability to own three hair salons, a car, and a flat in South Africa is evident that the land is responding to their needs and that they have been accepted in the new space. Interviews with those who have been in South Africa for more than five years but who are still unable to prosper reveal their belief that the land has not welcomed them.

There are usually different forms of narratives but I decided to use my own research among Pentecostal Christians in KwaZulu-Natal where I have been engaged in research since 2001. The fieldwork was done amongst African migrants, a group of people who live transnational lives and are desperate to eke a living in the midst of the adverse realities of living out of their country of origin.

Since the purpose of the research was to capture peoples' experiences, I decided to focus on members of the Redemptive International Power Ministry. This church offers a social space in which new immigrants from other African countries can meet and form social relations. It naturally also gives people opportunities to assess the viability of niche markets. Newcomers often use the contacts they make in this religious space to learn how to go about renewing their visas since most of them enter the country only with a tourist visa. Since most of the members of this church came into South Africa with this type of visa, it becomes difficult for them to assess employment in the formal sector. The visiting and resident pastors of these Pentecostal churches however organize crusades where the message of restoring hope is preached to the people. These crusades are coupled with the practice of fasting and prayer. I participated in these meetings for the sake of data collection. Information collected was supplemented and crystallized through in-depth interviews with fifteen people. This church was made up of fifty regular members but whenever there was a visiting preacher in town attendance at services for the entire period of the crusade fluctuated from one hundred to sometimes three hundred.

A common form of prayer in these services was the exorcistic injunction: Any power in the sea, land or air blocking my blessings, scatter! In Jesus name! Everyone would be expected to repeat these prayers several times as loudly and violently as they can so that the

offending powers located in the environment would eventually obey and depart. Crusades are intentionally organized so that the immigrant population would be filled with the Holy Spirit and thus be empowered to resist the forces of adversity in this foreign land and pave the way for their eventual success in life. People come to these crusades with firm expectation that the prayers offered fervently and in faith are effective in exorcising the evil powers that are located in the environment.

In South Africa, most immigrants are unable to purchase houses, buy new cars, and raise start-up capital for big business because of their inability to access bank loans. All these adversities drive them directly into the hands of especially the visiting preachers who promise to offer prayers and use substances from the environment which will alter their circumstances. In most of these meetings, Christians are told to collect soil and bring to the crusade venue for the preacher to pray over them. After prayers are offered, they are requested to wake up at midnight and scatter the soil outside their residence. They are enjoined to speak to the land (soil they scatter) and cause it to be favourable to them. According to their belief in the power of the spoken word as recorded in the book of 2 Corinthians 4: 13, "I believe therefore I have spoken," believers repeat those recognized scripts which has become a kind of 'truth.' One such prayer, for example, is: "In this land, I will buy houses, cars and my business will prosper, in the name of Jesus!" They believe that this new magical means will help them attain otherwise unattainable ends. They regard actions of this kind as constituting a "new magic for new situations." The activities described here could be understood in terms of a worldview that asserts that human lives are a battlefield in which fierce struggles rage between spirits located in the environment that wish human beings well and those that seek to harm them.

2.2. Shifting the Methodology from Text to Territory

Previous understanding holds that texts constitute a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social structures, relations, and processes.[2] According to Fairclough,[3] texts are sensitive barometers of social processes, movement and diversity and can provide good indicators

[2]A. E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*, London: Sage Publications, 2005.

[3]N. Fairclough, "Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis with Discourse Analysis", in A. Jaworski, and N. Coupland, eds., *The Discourse Reader*, London: Routledge, 1999, 183-212.

of social change. In the context of beliefs which operate at the level of experience, such understandings has short-coming because text are political and often carry embedded meanings.

To properly understand the ritualized constructions of space, there is the need to shift our interpretation from text to territory.[4] This requires methodological change of not just studying religion as written text[5] but repositioning ourselves by studying it as it as lived phenomenon to be studied through ethnographic accounts. This may result in an awareness of reality of what in a different context may be deemed 'unreal.'[6] In this context, the ethnographic account will consist mainly of experiences that cannot be seen or measured. Privileging experiences takes into account the subjectivity of the informants and that of the researcher. This approach gives the researcher the opportunity to move in and out of the emic-etic dichotomy. Acknowledgement of the researcher's position and the dynamics of the different levels of interpretation provide reality without privileging a particular subjectivity over another.

As one engages in the domain of privileging peoples' beliefs or experiences and using these as the starting point for understanding the environment, it becomes crucial to remember that these are highly subjective. According to Bruner, lived experience, comprising thoughts and desires, words and images is the primary reality.[7] People are seen as active agents in the world rather than passive reproducers of the systematic aspects of culture. Hastrup[8] notes that individual sensations and subjective viewpoints are generalized and presented as objective knowledge. She further suggests that there is a discursive space in which reasonable ways of talking about the environment may be meaningfully juxtaposed.

The difference is made here between realist ethnography and reflexive ethnography. Realist ethnography will contextualize a belief in

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[4]E. W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York: Verso, 1989; T. A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Catholic Shrine in Miami*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[5]R. A. Orsi, *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 1999.

[6]K. Hastrup, *The Challenge of the Unreal, Cultural History*, London: Routledge, 1987, 1:50-62. .

[7]E. M. Bruner, "Experience and Its Expressions," in V. Turner, and E. M. Bruner eds., *The Anthropology of Experience*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

[8]K. A. Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory*, London: Routledge, 1995.

terms of the positionality of the people practicing such belief while reflexive ethnography recognizes the experiences of the ethnographer as a co-creator of meaning. Contextualisation itself does bring in the presence of the ethnographer because his/her presence jointly with those of the informants constitute the understanding generated in that context. Hastrup notes that the place incorporates the ethnographer; in an important sense, she is the ritual context-maker.[9] She does not construct reality, even if it is never uncontaminated by her knowledge interests. She is part of the defining consciousness of the space. By shifting our methodology from text to territory, I am trying to highlight the experiences that are embedded in the spaces we study of both the researcher and the researched.

2.3. Challenges of This Shift for the Researcher

For a classical Geographer, an environment is a mere physical entity where everything can be seen, felt and touched. While this is now changing in the field of Human geography it has never really been the case of proper understanding from the perspective of religion. In religion, the environment had long been understood as being imbued with spiritual meaning. The environment is a religious and cognitive entity with diverse subjectivities which are socially constructed. What is considered real is not only what is observable or what makes cognitive sense; but also the invisible, the emotional, the sentimental or the inexplicable.[10] According to Mbembe,[11] understanding the visible is hardly complete without investigating the invisible. The visible is in the invisible and vice-versa. Here, the environment is more than a mere locale, but a setting where things happen and the socially constructed ways in which people engage with it.

As a researcher how does one capture the complex web of meanings, explanations and experiences when one has ones' own? Such a study entails multivocal lattice of the various actors, including the researcher, with diverse forms of interpretation. Every experience is a type of script with multiple layers of interpretation. As I inducted myself in the field trying to understand and build knowledge on how African migrants are increasingly relating to the environment and their personal circumstances in ritualized terms, I realized that I had to deal with the interpretation of different layers of construction:

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[9]Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology*, 57.

[10]B. Okri, *The Famished Road*, London: Vintage, 1991.

[11]Achille Mbembe, "'The Thing' and Its Double in Cameroonian Cartoons" in K. Barber, ed., *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Oxford: James Currey, 1997.

- The construction of the Pentecostal pastors
- The construction of Pentecostal believers

The major challenge I encountered was how to juggle these different levels of constructions in a manner that depicts its specificity without necessarily evoking a discourse based on scepticism. This challenge was further highlighted by the dangers of my own construction (being a member of one of the categories listed above) infiltrating and taking prime position within my analysis. Here, Knorr-Cetina's concept of methodological situationalism[12] became important since it enabled me to prioritise the situations of the migrants, which paved the way for the analysis of micro-reasons surrounding their participation in the different rituals.

Faced with the data, I had to interpret them, without which it would be meaningless. Geertz noted that what we call our data are really our own construction of other peoples' constructions.[13] Within these parameters, I had to try and find my way through the piled-up structures of inferences and implications which constitute the discourse of everyday exchange.

Because of the complexity involved in this study, I realized that the phenomenon under investigation would be best understood if located in the interpretive and hermeneutic paradigm (s) of ethnographic research.[14] These approaches demonstrate a continual engagement with participants' interpretation or recognized systems of meaning and the contextual script embedded in a hermeneutic circle.

3. Space, Place and Religion

Because human beings are situated in territories and the fact that people believe that they are rooted in a place and derive their identity out of that rootedness it become difficult to understand them out of their environment. Malkki calls it the 'metaphysics of sendentism,' which she believes,

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[12]Knorr-Cetina, "The Micro-Social Order," in Fielding, N., ed., *Actions and Structures*, London: SAGE, 1989.

[13]Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description" in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.

[14]W. Goodenough, *Culture, Language and Society*, Reading: Addison Wesley Modular Publications, 1971; E. C. Hirschman, "Humanistic Inquiry in Marketing Research: Philosophy, Method, and Criteria," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1986, 23-49; N. K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism*, Newburg Park: Sage Publications, 1989; Roy D'Andrade, "Cultural Meaning Systems," in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, A. S. Richard, and R. A. Le Vine, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

territorialises our identities.[15] Gellner[16] had pointed earlier that this has to do with the manner in which researchers have often conceptualized the spatial arrangements of peoples. Space and place has often been a key area of interest to Anthropologist because the people they study are located in it.[17] Elsewhere Ojong, and Sithole,[18] have noted that this has been the basis for place assuming essentialist characteristics. On his part Dougan[19] has argued that essentialist conceptualizations serve the key function of providing permanent, clear and thick boundaries.

The tendency to territorialize beliefs is authentic to Pentecostal Christians because of their long-term association with the environment in ways that their view of reality cannot be fully understood outside their embeddedness to it. Reference is made to the book of Acts of the Apostles in the Holy Bible (Acts 17: 26): "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." Christians hold the belief that when God places someone in an environment, he also makes provision for their survival: "Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there on one of the mountains I will tell you about." "Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22: 3, 13). It is therefore destiny according to these Christians for their identity to be territorialized. Gupta and Ferguson have argued that these embodiments are lived in spaces. According to such point of view, being anchored in a place is essential for human existence and survival.

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[15]Lisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and Territorialisation of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees" in Gupta A. and Ferguson J. eds., *Culture, Power, and Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, London: Duke University Press, 2002.

[16]Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

[17]Herietta Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991; H. Moore, *Space, Text and Gender: An Anthropological Study of Marakwet of Kenys*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

[18]Vivian Besem Ojong and Mpilo Pearl Sithole, "The Substance of Identity: Territoriality, Culture, Roots and the Politics of Belonging," *African Anthropologist* 14, 1&2 (2007), 89-98.

[19]M. A. Dougan, "Spectre Is Haunting Europe... Free Movement of Persons and the Eastern Enlargement" in C. Hillion, ed., *Enlargement of the European Union: A Legal Approach*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2004.

Generally speaking, people's experiences are embedded in places. Low and Lawrence-Zuniga aptly noted that the relationship between people and their surrounding entails more than attaching meaning to space, but involves the recognition and cultural elaboration of perceived properties of environments in mutually constituting ways through narratives and praxis. As Anthropologists, we are most concerned about ways in which people relate to their environments and how this relationship is mutually constituted. Often people who inhabit a place feel something about their environment and act in ritualized ways. In the case of migration and displacement when the environment is new and there is no prior attachment and energies linking people to it, they resort to rituals and if existing rituals are insufficient, they invent new ones.

4. Ritualised Conceptualization of Place

Since religion has guidelines for behaviour, it directly or indirectly determines how people relate to the environment and how they construct their world view in relation to it. These ritualized constructions refer to the idea that the environment is imbued with spiritual power. From a theoretical stand-point, place plays an important role in religious writing because every religion originates from a specific locale which are imbued with spiritual meaning. Place has been described in literature as having localizing tendencies,[20] or as imbued with ideas.[21] In most West African countries where most of the informants come from, when a child is born his or her umbilical cord is buried in the ground. This does create a strong tie between that individual and the environment and associated with it are rituals. These rituals have become structural cognitive scripts which guide the behaviour of people, inform the thought patterns and serves as a guide to action.

The invisible world that most Africans believe to exist may be inhabited by all kinds of invisible beings and spirits of various sorts undoubtedly hold a prominent place in it.[22] McAlister[23] noted that space is

[20]R. Fardon, ed., *Localising Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*, Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

[21]A. Appadurai, "Introduction: Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory," *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988), 16-20; "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988), 36-49.

[22]S. Ellis, and G. T. Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, Johannesburg: Wit University Press, 2001.

[23]E. McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

infused with spiritual energies and can be ruled by principalities and powers invested with theological and spiritual significance. Lefebvre asserts that human beings relate to the environment on all levels, physically, mentally and socially.

According to La Fontaine,[24] ritual is purposive; the participants believe that they are accomplishing their aim in what they do. The social life of individuals changes constantly but what is relatively constant is the part played by ideas and beliefs through which individuals both perceive events and evaluate their own and others' behaviour. The migrants in the study come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and the context of their lives had changed significantly. The hard realities of making a living abroad create a high level of anxiety for migrants. As it is the rhetoric of the migration process, old ties and connections are left behind. Migrants find themselves in an impersonal place and therefore hold on to their beliefs as a means of conquering adversity in the country of aboard. Before emigration some had formal paid employment; in South Africa, however, their social locations have changed significantly. Currently some are car guards, street vendors, hairdressers, fashion designers, and most are found at the margins of the mainstream economy. In order to survive under such new and often challenging circumstances, these people have turned to their beliefs that the environment can either retard or advance their progress in life since it harbours certain 'evil spirits.'

Interview with Pastor Joseph (a visiting pastor from Nigeria who claimed of having a travelling ministry called end-time message) in September 2009 in Durban confirmed the Pentecostal belief that evil spirits have their strongholds in the environment which impacts on peoples' lives negatively. He quoted the scripture in Mark 5: 8-10: "For Jesus had said to him, come out of this man, you evil spirit. Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again not to send them out of the area. In referring to the above Pastor Joseph said that evil spirits inhabit particular places and although they possess human beings, they are not afraid to be exorcised as long as they could remain in the same environment. So these evil spirits in the scripture lived in Gadarenes and wanted to remain there. In Mark 5:12, the evil spirits pleaded with Jesus "send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them." Similarly, interviews with Pastor Andoh of Redemptive Power ministry confirmed these beliefs.

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[24]J. La Fontaine, *Initiation*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985.

He however referred to ground and place symbolically. He referred me to a scripture in Ephesians 4:27: "And do not give the devil a foothold." He said Christians should not give evil spirits "ground" or "place." For him, it represents an empty space or ground. It means Christians should not allow evils spirits residing in the environment space to live in their lives. I interviewed three married women from Zimbabwe who all told me that immediately they arrived in South Africa they were warned to guard against the spirit of "lust" which governs South Africa. They were warned by other Christian women who were earlier migrants to be protective of their husbands because the spirit of lust which leads to divorce is in South Africa. They cited examples of some migrant women who have been abandoned by their husbands who are now married to or co-habit with South African women. I was later referred to one of the women (Jane) whose husband has abandoned her. This is what she said: *My husband left me and our three children in Ghana and came to South Africa in 2005. In 2007, he bought out ticket and we arrived only to discover that he was living with another woman. He rented a house for me and the children and only visited us during the day. When I inquired, he told me that he had to marry her so that he could stay legally in the country but he lied about my relationship with him to the South African woman. He told her that I was simply his children's mother and he had no other relationship with me. I was advised by my Christian sisters to pray and break the spirit of divorce and lust which were controlling my husband.* After the interview, she referred me to Ana (a Nigerian woman) whose husband also treated her in a similar manner. When I interviewed Ana, I discovered that her husband lives in the same house with her but they sleep in separate bedrooms and have no sexual relationship. She said, "*The spirit of this environment is a wicket spirit; I wonder how many women will lose their husbands in this country. I am trusting God to deliver my husband from this spirit.*"

Heward-Mills confirms these beliefs:

> I have known of people who had happy marriages until they moved to certain countries. Thereafter their marriages deteriorated rapidly. I said to a divorced friend, 'perhaps you wouldn't have divorced if you hadn't come to this country.' He said to me, 'I agree with you 100%; this would never have happened if I had stayed in my home country.' He continued. 'In my country divorce is unusual but here, even pastors divorce easily.'[25]

[25]Dag Heward-Mills, *Demons and How to Deal with Them*, Wellington: Lux Verbi, BM, 2008.

He further advices that when one moves into a new physical location, it is ones' spiritual duty to assess what kind of spiritual presence pertains because evil spirits always have the tendency to dominate areas with their evil presence.

These women and others in the research have resorted to the use of ritual prayers to restore their marriages. They all believe that with appropriate prayers, the spirits in the place which are controlling their husbands will be over-come. They have now turned to the rituals discussed in 2.1, what Comaroff and Comaroff,[26] have termed "the constant pursuit of new, magical means for otherwise unattainable ends." Elsewhere they have described it as a mode of producing new forms of consciousness and as a means of retooling culturally familiar technologies as new means for new ends; new magic for new situations.[27]

Since ritual is a purposive behaviour, it accomplishes its objectives of transition and maintenance of both the social and the moral order.[28] Some in the Durkheimian school of thought believe that ritual has the ability to bind society while those in the Levi-Straussian believe that rituals are symbolic meanings embedded in structures. My major interest here is trying to understand how Pentecostal Christians believe that rituals can impact their lives in transforming ways; specifically when the place of the rituals have to be reconceptualised. Attention is placed on the symbolism of certain aspects of the environment like water, soil and how peoples' experiences become embedded in new spaces. As I inducted myself in the field trying to understand how through rituals space can be reconceptualised, it became clear that these rituals are believed to influence believer's destiny and causes a change in their outlook in life.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussions it is evident that people relate to the environment in ritualized ways. Participating in the services, interviewing people and trying to understand why rituals were symbolically demonstrated through prayer, the functionality of belief or ritual was

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[26]John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* 26, 2 (1999), 279-303.

[27]John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, eds., *In Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

[28]A. R. Radcliff-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1952; Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965.

brought in question and not necessarily the perception or subjective reasoning surrounding the ritual. Every ritual is intended to serve a function and in this case 'a way of deriving explanations' for the inexplicable circumstances that these migrants find themselves in. Their involvement does provide some hope and a 'thread' to hang on to. By symbolically enacting the rituals as a response to their lived experiences, the rituals become meaningful and it does facilitates the means to their subjective reasoning. Having documented the experiences of Pentecostal Christians I am afraid of drawing broader conclusions on the relationship between religion and the environment. This is because the study population was constituted by migrants and by its nature; migration creates a sense of emptiness, disconnectedness and alienation and migrants in most cases would look for ways of filling the gap. Through the invention of new religious rituals, a new consciousness as well as a new cosmic relationship is created in the new milieu. The challenge of migration and settlement heightens their consciousness to the role of ritual as a coping mechanism and a feeling of empowerment to combating the forces in the environment adverse to their lives. What is clear is the ways in which these migrants make sense of their world and construct reality around religious rituals relating to the environment. I am not suggesting here that migration creates conditions for rituals to be invented but rather that humans have the tendency to relate with the environment in ritual terms and when displaced either by force (in the case of natural disasters or war) or by choice (as in the case of economic migrants), they will re-connect with the environment in ritualized terms. These are conscious actions taken with the intention of experiencing change in their lives and serves as a means to an end. Pentecostal practices of this nature as the analysis portrays is not text-based but easily malleable since it is oriented towards solving the problems of the people and is highly pragmatic.

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ECOLOGICAL REALITY: Its Crisis and Praxis

Oliver Inchody[♦]

1. Introduction

The ecological reality that shapes the consciousness of a human mind has a dual face: the crisis it undergoes and its praxis. This presentation delineates the dual face of the ecological reality, crisis and praxis, as a basis for an ecological conscientisation appropriate to an average human mind.

In an attempt to clarify further the complicated nature of ecology, postmodern ecologists have pointed out certain laws and principles regarding ecology.[1] They are: (a) The earth is more complex than we can ever think of (principle of complexity). (b) Everything is interconnected and intermingled with everything else (principle of dependence). (c) The earth's life support system can take much stress and abuse, but there are limits to what it can take (law of limits). (d) Each species and each organism can tolerate only a certain range of environmental condition (principle of tolerance range). (e) Any chemical that we produce should not interfere with any of earth's life-support systems. (f) No population can keep growing indefinitely (principle of carrying capacity).

These laws and principles provide a basis for the understanding of ecology. Ecological reality has become a matter of grave concern for organizations, people movements, nations, etc., because of the 'doomsday scenario' that predicted imminent "ecotastrophe" if present trends in population, food production, global warming, ozone depletion, species extinction, and worldwide toxic pollution resulting from the eco-impact of industrial civilization, and continuous resource depletion go on unabated.[2]

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[1]These laws and principles clearly show the complicated nature of ecological reality, which is the web of life-nonlife, each interrelated, interconnected, interdependent, and interbonded to each other and to the whole: variety-similarity patterns, interactions-interdependencies, continuity-change, cycles-rhythms, and evolution-adaptation. For further reference, see Gene Wilhelm, "Theology of Ecology," in *Ecology and Religion: Scientists Speak*, eds. John E. Carroll and Keith Warner, Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1998, 270.

[2]See R. L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, 227-41 and 251-68.

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The present ecological crisis has developed as a result of the disruption of the structure that is designed within the web of relationships.

2. Eco-Crisis: A Cancerous Reality

Even if we witness and live in the very core of the historic consciousness with all its consequences, there is evidently a growing awareness that the world is in a crisis. The cosmos is in a critical situation of decay and its continued destruction by human beings poses serious problems that affect the human beings themselves. Large issues, like global warming, the depletion of ozone layer, and natural resource management, and more local problems, like safe drinking water and toxic storage and clean-up, affect God's creation. The poor in the Asian countries disproportionately face environmental hazards that affect their communities and the future of their children. Through some international pacts, or manipulative schemes, the developing countries are forced into a suicidal export of its forest and natural resources. Enormous amount of rain forests, trees, and vegetation have disappeared every year in many of the Asian countries due to indiscriminate felling of trees and damming of rivers.

The present ecological crisis did not happen abruptly. People are to be blamed for such a situation on this earth. 'Crisis' means a state of emergency or difficulty or distress. Ecological crisis is, thus, a situation of distress that has been created by the human interaction with the ecological systems to the extent of inflicting distress or a state of emergency on the earth. The contributing factors in creating an ecological crisis are multidimensional and have a vicious nature. Among them there are power-play, over-population, anthropocentrism, and developmental thrust.

Power-Play: Power plays a major role in creating ecological crisis. Nations, authorities, corporations, etc. become sources of this kind of power; the power invested upon those persons/corporations is used in an abusive way that has victimized the weak and the earth itself.[3] A distorted notion of power engulfs the rights and the resources especially of the poor nations and endangers their survival. Ecologically, this situation makes the Asian region a crisis-stricken area in the world.

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[3]For example, the production of high-grade-copper cathodes is a hazardous business. Japan Inc., therefore, exports the operation to the places made vulnerable by poverty, like the Philippines. There they acquired four hundred acres of land, appropriated from the poor, and the emissions from the plant spew out high levels of boron, arsenic, heavy metals, and sulphur, contaminating local water, reducing fishing and rice yields, killing forests, and sickening the people. David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1995, 31-32.

Over-Population: Life of the earth-community in this planet is delicately controlled by a check and balance system that has helped maintain the population level of most species. Human beings are the only exception. Out of the total world population of 6.5 billion, Asia shares more than half of it with the population of China and India going up to 2.3 billion. By the year 2050, the UN Population Fund forecasts, world population will rise to ten billion people before levelling off at 11.6 billion after the year 2150.[4] With 11.6 billion people competing for the planet's soil, water, and air, will the earth stand the strain – without suffering an ecological breakdown? An increase in the human population is likely to place more strain upon the life-support systems of the earth. Although an aggressive population control is one measure to meet the crisis of the increase of human species, there are some basic human values that development policies should keep.[5] Such a situation generated by the inordinate increase in the population on this planet amidst the limited and temporal resources makes the crisis situation more severe.

Anthropocentrism: Environmentalists use this term to refer to the current concept of placing humanity at the centre of the world and all life forms. According to Lynn White, Jr., anthropocentrism is the result of a western life-style, which is being 'exported' excessively to the developing countries in the form of technology and progress.[6] Authors argue that in handing over the power to humanity, the writings of western intelligentsia,[7] like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton,

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[4]See David S. Toolan, "Open to Life-and to Death: The Church on Population Issues," in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*, eds. Albert J. LaChance and John C. Carroll, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, 37.

[5]From an Asian point of view, especially, concern about the limited resources of the earth and about sustainable development has to be seriously taken into account. Often, these Asian aspects blind people to the necessity of basic human values, such as love, family, etc., that are involved in the population problem. The Church in Asia believes that such basic values are being ignored by development policies that prescribe an aggressive population control, which is targeted especially against the majority poor of Asia. See Orlando B. Quevedo, "Development in Asia: A View from Below," *Landas* 10 (July 1996), 145-46. For a detailed exposition on relationship of population explosion and the depletion of the earth resources, see Sean McDonagh, *The Greening of the* Church, Manila: Claretian Publications, 1990, 38-73.

[6]Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967), 1203-1207.

[7]As the founding fathers of modern science, Descartes, Bacon, etc., recognized that the emerging scientific revolution would give humans greater control over nature. As McDonagh opines, "... Once rebellious nature is tamed the complete

provided justification for the progressive drive to manipulate and conquer nature. While this western 'dominion' in Asia was anchored only in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, the roots of anthropocentrism date back to the earliest forms of western consciousness both in the Jewish and Greek experience. Although there is an apparent excessive permissiveness in its interpretation, ecologically, an anthropocentric conception of the modern world presents human beings as the pinnacle and crown of creation, in contrast to the theocentric conception of the world in the Bible.[8] Humanity is provided with power over the natural world, which, in turn, is seen as a power to manipulate and mould raw materials for their own purposes and betterment. It is clear that the anthropocentric concept is in strict conflict to that of the ecological concept, in that the latter puts in the centre the totality of the cosmos, or nature, or life.[9] From the perspective of an ecological crisis, this erroneous phenomenon of anthropocentrism creates excessive damage not only to humans but also to the earth.

Developmental Thrust: 'Development' is a complex phenomenon, which includes both negative and positive connotations. From an ecological point of view, the prevailing concept of development is not so much in line with 'pro-life.' This is a paradox since development is said to be executed in the name of civilization, precisely to effect a global

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human control, which was thought to have existed in Paradise before the Fall, would be restored. Thus in Descartes' celebrated phrase, it would make humans 'masters and possessors of nature.'" Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1995, 126.

[8]Jürgen Moltmann in his famous work, *God in Creation*, has developed this concept of anthropocentrism and discovers the related consequences on earth. His main thrust in this book is to establish a cosmological theocentricity by which God's dominion over the world has to be reinstated. According to him, "the crown of creation is not the human being; it is the Sabbath," a mentality to be re-read in the eco-theological spirit. For an interesting discussion on this subject, see his work, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985, 20-40.

[9]Affirming the Christian vision of anthropocentricism Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, places "man" – meaning, of course, humanity – at the centre of the world, entrusted with responsibility for the well-being of the planet [30]. Acknowledging the Christian tradition, the Pope reiterates the central position of "man," not because "he" is powerful; human beings are central because they are *persons*. To be a person is to have reason; it is to have access to truth. So this placing of human beings at the centre of the world need not be misinterpreted as anthropocentrism. The Pope is only re-emphasizing the Christian meaning of being a *person* whose position is *central*, not to rule, but to be responsible.

institutional human culture. John Haught calls this side of 'development' as "scientific materialism," which means that, "*matter* alone is real and that all phenomena in the universe can be adequately understood as special applications of the laws of chemistry and physics."[10] Purely economic measure of well-being, such as the Gross National Product (GNP), fails to capture the variety of goods that contribute to human happiness and indeed produces a great deal of confusion and dissatisfaction in the human pursuit of happiness, and the integrity of the creation. The risk of what Pope John Paul II called 'economism' is that it reduces everything to its economic value, so that, in a pursuit of profit, humans lose the appreciation of the goods that make them whole.[11] The Pope's critique of western materialism and development is a sober reminder of how destructive economics can be in the absence of human and ecological considerations. A mad rush for development, devoid of the principles of justice and ethics, always intensifies to uproot ancient cultures including their habitat, disappearance of species, degradation of eco-systems, soil erosion, etc. Enumerating further the tragic consequences of this thrust, Baird Callicott writes,

> Now, however, in addition to local events, such as those that recently occurred in Prince William Sound, Bhopal, and Chernobyl, the environmental crisis is understood to have an additional, global dimension – global warming, stratospheric ozone thinning, abrupt massive species extinction, destruction of the world's girdle of tropical forests, etc.[12]

The developmental projects and schemes of governments, corporations and states, thus, cause great deal of fear and anxiety among peoples and environmentalists because of the insensitivity of those programs to the lives of the people and the eco-systems of the earth.[13] The above-

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[10]John F. Haught, "Religious and Cosmic Homelessness: Some Environmental Implications," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch, William Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 164.

[11]John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), Encyclical Letter, 13.

[12]J. Baird Callicott, "Toward a Global Environmental Ethic," in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, 31.

[13]One of the tragic consequences of these developmental thrusts is massive urbanization in Asia. Urbanization has profoundly transformed the natural landscapes everywhere throughout the world, inevitably exerting pervasive effects on the structure and function of ecosystems. Undoubtedly, urbanization in Asia will continue to have significant impacts on the environment as well as on economic, social and political

mentioned factors that generate and accelerate a crisis situation in the ecological reality of the earth are only a few to name. These factors clarify that the ecological crisis is not an accidental phenomenon; rather, it is being created, generated and actualized by human insensitivity. The crisis leaves concrete effects on the lives on earth and the eco-systems of nature. Deep within the human beings' consciousness, it leaves scars of an erroneous life-style evolving out of a valueless and ethic-free life.

The severity of the crisis urges humans to undo this ecological imbalance. In overcoming this crisis, humanity has to concentrate on the strengths of nature – nature as a perfect solidarity sharing and communicating to each other, mutually nourishing and perfecting. This calls for a praxis-oriented ecological consciousness, so that humanity may concentrate on the positive aspects of nature, and challenge the demeaning mentality of 'science.' This will provide a chance for change, a paradigm to inculcate values of eco-praxis. Change is possible in an atmosphere of conversion from self-centred to other-centred life or what has been called a movement "from 'egological' to ecological consciousness." To achieve this, awareness has to be created in all people that it involves a hatred of eco-devastation and a longing for eco-restoration and an imperative to "affirm and consecrate their solidarity with all creation."[14] The following section discusses this aspect of earth-community, its relationships in terms of co-existence and pro-existence.

3. Care for the Earth and Rights of the Earth: Paradigms for Eco-Praxis

Ed de la Torre, a liberation theologian from the Philippines, rearranges the priorities of the WCC's JPIC programs in a simple but radical way, which may provide a suitable context for this presentation. To quote,

> Liberation, peace and ecology are all important causes, but fundamental to each of them is justice. If they are represented as three overlapping circles, justice is the area of their overlap, and the

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processes at local, regional and global scales. Rapid urbanization in most developing countries in Asia since the 1990s has been accompanied by a proliferation of slums and dysfunctional neighbourhoods with high health risks. High rates of urbanization and industrialization have increased the demands for land, water, and energy, and resulted in expanding transportation networks that constitute a key accelerating factor in economic growth as well as environmental degradation. For example, urbanization and economic growth in many Asian countries frequently result in air and water pollution, loss of productive agricultural land, loss and fragmentation of species habitats, over-extraction of groundwater resources, and deforestation as a consequence of increased demand for construction timber (UNEP 2000).

[14]William McNamara, *Earthly Mysticism*, New York: Crossroad, 1983, 103.

> closer they draw together the greater becomes the scope of justice. Peace and ecology are thus reclaimed as universal, not merely First World issues, but only insofar as they become arenas for the practical working of justice.[15]

This idea would be clearer through a linguistic analysis. The idea of justice, owing as much to biblical *sedaqah* and *mishpat* as to the Roman concept of *ius*, is a cardinal principle of the entire western tradition. Among the finest fruits of western tradition of justice are the theory of *ius naturale* and the universal declaration of human rights to which it gave rise.[16] Based on these perspectives of *ius naturale*, many of the Asian religions like, Hinduism, and Buddhism argue that nature also has a 'Justice Tradition' and that they have 'Rights,' too. The Bible also refers to the Rights of Nature.

If the cultural metaphor of the West is *ius*, which refers to an anthropocentric view of the world, the East has developed an equal but more significant word *dhamma* (also *dharma*), which connotes not mere justice but encompasses 'cosmic order' in which human beings actively participate. The religious traditions, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc., can each provide a plausible basis for human rights. However, a mere intellectual justification of these rights is of little help. For Thomas Berry, the domain of ecological ethics "concerns the manner whereby humans give expression at the rational level to the ethics of this larger community."[17] Broadening their horizons people may see themselves within the larger context of the earth as an integral community of all living and non-living components. Concretizing this aspect of becoming one among the larger community of the earth, humans have to employ the "caring" mentality; as the lack of it consequently results into a crisis in this world.

3.1. Towards an Ethics of Ecological Care

Respect and care for the earth and its symbolisms require ecological sensitivity and life-centeredness. To be ecologically caring is to be

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[15]Cited from John D'Arcy May, "Rights of the Earth and Care for the Earth: Two Paradigms for Buddhist-Christian Ecological Ethics," *Horizon* 21 (Spring 1994), 51-52.

[16]"Natural Law, Rights, Human," and "Justice," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Law, New York: Crossroad, 1987; and also in *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. John Macquarrie, London: SCM Press, 1967, s. v. "Natural Rights."

[17]Thomas Berry, "Ethics and Ecology," unpublished paper (1994); cited from Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, 138.

knowledgeable about, and respectful of, the beauty and dynamic equilibrium of ecosystems, particularly those upon which one has an impact and of which one is a part. To be ecologically caring is also to be cognizant that all entities – from protons to living cells to animals and galaxies – are formed by their relations to their environments. In the Asian religions, to be life-centred is to be especially attuned to the value of living being amid one's ecological sensitivity, cognizant of their value in, and for themselves, for one another, and for all beings. This 'caring' concept reminds one to recognize the value of living beings in and for themselves and the intrinsic value of creation's existence. By doing so, there is no danger of denying the creatures' relationality; rather it is to recognize that, amid their dependence on environment, they are concerned with their own survival and well-being. Their lives are of value for themselves, and ought concomitantly to be of value to us. Caring for creation entails, thus, the recognition that all living beings, humans and non-humans alike, are "neighbours." This metaphor, "neighbour," can help human beings to see more vividly that wisdom, responsibility, justice and caring comprise the essence of humankind's relationship with other creatures.[18]

A Genesis text on the 'covenant relationship' also exemplifies this task of human beings to be a "neighbour" (Gen 9:8-13). Robert Murray recognizes the environmental implications of passages like this in the Scripture as one of being biocentric, rather than a homocentric, which calls for an understanding of the depth of being a "neighbour." For him the Noah text (Gen 9:8-17) involves a cosmic covenant, which "binds humans and animals together as the Creator's partners."[19] For some environmental authors, this concept of being a "neighbour" to the earth realities is termed as "an ethic of companionship."[20]

The 'caring' aspect of the earth and its beings is nothing new to Asian Christians. However, the Asian Church has to re-emphasize these aspects in its theological-pastoral framework while actively entering into

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[18]In an environmental ethic, the definition of "neighbour" can be extended to all living creatures, indeed to the earth and the universe. For Hill, "it (neighbour) is not only private and individual but also public and social, concerned with justice and resistance to evil, violence, and oppression in all forms." B. R. Hill, *Christian Faith and the Environment: Making Vital Connections*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998, 270.

[19]Robert Murray, "The Relationship of Creatures within the Cosmic Covenant," *The Month* 251 (November 1990), 427.

[20]Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology," *Commonweal* 117, 26 January 1990, 46.

the scene of ecological conscientization among its flock. In enabling the people to take care of the values of eco-ethics, the elements of eco-justice take its precedence. Without the awareness and consciousness of their justice principle, the caring aspects will be incomplete. To deepen this way of life where one has to care for the earth and its beings, the following section regarding 'Justice' and 'Right' of the earth would be helpful.

3.2. Eco-Justice: A Cry from the Bottom of the Earth

Only recently did humankind come to the consciousness of the 'justice' aspect of the earth and start to campaign to protect the 'rights' of the earth, accordingly. This attempt to link concern for justice with ecology is now being called working for "eco-justice." This concept of 'eco-justice' is undeniably different from that of the western concept of justice. If the West has designed its ethical systems to curb the worst excess of consumerism, the 'eco-justice,' by contrast, though it does not assert "human rights" in the western sense, safeguards them indirectly in the ascetic ethic of the *ahimsa* and *pancasila* ('the five basic precepts') of the Asian religious systems. This justice system, which has its flavour and taste of the Asian religiosity, invites not just respect for, but identification with all beings, not because of their usefulness for humans, but because of their own intrinsic value. R. L. Sarkar, an Indian eco-theologian, speaks strongly on this theme:

> Eco-justice pushed us to the formation of a new social paradigm, a new set of assumptions, standards, values, and habits appropriate to a new era in the history of the world, an era in which men and women come to terms, with the lessons of the ecology crisis – that the planet is finite and that justice must be eco-justice.[21]

Virtually identical concerns were also voiced at the WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991:

> Responsibility requires that we recognize the character of the crisis in our midst ... Pursuing justice requires us to learn new ways of paying attention to all creation – the land, water, air, all people, plant life and other living creature. A new vision will integrate our interdependent ecological, social, economic, political and spiritual needs. We want to say as forcefully as we can that social justice for all people and eco-justice for all creation must go together ... This way of viewing justice helps us understand the linkage between

[21]Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment*, 197.

poverty, powerlessness, social conflict and environmental degradation [1, 5].[22]

Apart from the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Bishops' Conferences from many parts of the world, the Earth Summit Council at Rio de Janeiro – all stress eco-justice, so that recognition of relational harmony and the interdependence of all forms of life are established.[23] All these voices unanimously call out for justice for the earth that should not be viewed as a mere depository of natural resources for human exploitation in support of endless economic growth. In this context, the values articulated by the Church, which stress respect for the integrity of all members of creation, human and otherwise, provide the criteria for evaluating economic approaches in terms of their social and ecological justice. In short, the eco-justice life-style, which also protects the "rights of the earth," moves toward community: away from the competitive individualism that maximizes one's own gain and causes another's loss, and towards cooperative, mutually supportive work. With less strain upon natural and social systems, there is more joy, more wholeness, more friendship and more protection from hunger and hazard. Thus, a life-style that acknowledges the effects of caring and eco-justice allows the people to be aware of the "rights of the earth," too.

3.3. The Ecological Nuances of the "Rights of the Earth"

From the above discussions on Ethical Care and Eco-Justice of the Earth, it is evident that the principles of responsibility and discursive ethics each in their own way pick up the age-old theme, "No Heaven without Earth," in order to work out the foundations and perspectives of an ethic of responsibility toward nature. Western Christian and humanist ethics find it hard to accept these insights because it balks at the fundamental *rights* of nature to be free from human ravishment. From an Asian point of view, these rights and care of the earth are a religious responsibility. Asian religions have striven in markedly different contexts and with

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[22]Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, February 7-20, 1991*, Geneva: WCC & Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991, 55.

[23]All these movements/organizations, in one voice, insist that eco-justice must become a part of the preaching of the churches. They also hold that eco-justice preachers must review the doctrines of Creation and Salvation, biblical principles of stewardship, theologies of nature and natural theology. For further discussions on the theme/s, see Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 200-02.

characteristically diverse motivations to exercise, or at least to influence the exercise of, and responsibility towards the "rights of the earth."

It must be clarified, however, that the recognition of the rights of nature (non-human nature) may not lead to the violation of any stage of conventional human existence or the denial of its rights. Rightly understood, the extension of guarantees in law to non-human forms of life also means more thorough legal guarantees for any facet of human life. One problem, at this juncture, may be encountered in the realm of morality by the world religions, especially the Asian religions. This problem concerns the possibilities of intervention provided by modern biotechnology, especially gene technology and the biology of procreation. If living beings have a right to life and to procreation in line with their species, interference with heredity and the reprogramming of their species is extremely problematical.[24]

With regards to the above arguments, the 'Berne Draft Resolution,'[25] delineates basic principles: (a) Nature, animate or inanimate, has a right to existence, i.e., to preservation and development; (b) Nature has a right to the protection of its ecosystems, and of the network of species and populations; (c) Animate nature has a right to the preservation and development of its genetic inheritance; (d) Living beings have a right to life in accordance with their species, including procreation, in the ecosystems appropriate to them; (e) Interventions in nature need to be justified... Nature, therefore, must be accorded its own rights. These "rights of the earth" are envisioned, basically, to protect nature from the atrocities of human arrogance and anthropocentric mentalities which cause various diverse effects. According to John Paul II, "The right to a safe environment is ever more insistently presented today as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights."[26] Paul Taylor strongly asserts that the denial of human superiority is "the single most important idea in establishing the justifiability of the attitude of respect for nature."[27]

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[24]G. Altner, "The Community of Creation as a Community in Law: The New Contract between the Generations," *Concilium, No Heaven without Earth*, 1991/4, 59.

[25]*Evangelische Theologie* 5, 1990, 436ff, quoted from Altner, "The Community of Creation as a Community in Law," 60.

[26]Cited from Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer, eds., *"And God Saw That It Was Good,"* Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic Conference, 219.

[27]Paul W. Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (Fall 1981), 211.

The religious implications of the "rights of the earth" are very important within the larger interest of this thesis. The ecological nuances of the rights of nature are so deep in the Asian religions, especially in the ethical formulations of *ahimsa*, which strongly insists on an undoing of violence. The Christian paradigm equal to this ethical code can be interpreted in "love" that discloses a "hyperethical dimension" which prevents the golden rule (cf. Luke 6: 31) from becoming just another version of *do ut des*, "I give you that you will give." James Nash is convinced that this biblical account of justice can easily accommodate the contemporary need to formulate both human environmental and "biotic" rights:

> As this conception of rights implies, rights entail correlative responsibilities on the part of communities of moral agents. This correlation does not imply that only moral agents can have rights … but rather only that moral agents have responsibilities to respect rights.[28]

The principle of "rights of the earth" suggests to, and even demands from, human beings this ecological integration, viz., to deal with planetary life as companion rather than enemy.

3.4. Relationship between the Earth and Life

The notion of community within the context of ecological reality needs to be broadened to include all living beings and the earth itself. The relationship between earth and life demands the recognition of the rights of both humans and non-humans to their existence and their place in their home environment. Such a relationship is 'co-existence' and 'pro-existence,' which is concerned with the creation of a total community of life that allows the human family to flourish, come to its full stature and give rise to 'earth family,' with whom "we share the obligation to promote the nurturance and well-being of each member."[29]

As a working principle to this relationship of the earth and life, Martin Buber provides the deepest foundation for the reverence of creation through his renowned formula, "I…thou." Himes gives an eco-ethical meaning to this formula:

> The recognition of the other as a creature and, therefore, that which exists because it is loved by God cannot occur where the other is

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[28]James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*, Washington, D.C.: The Church's Center for Theological Policy, 1991, 170.

[29]Jane Blewett, "Social Justice and Creation Spirituality," *The Way* 29, January 1989, 20.

> regarded as "it"... in Buber's terms, a sacrament is always "thou." Since every creature can and should be a sacrament, so every creature can and should be "thou," a companion.[30]

These principles of "new ethic" fundamentally embody the context for assessing humanity's responsibility toward the environment. Since human beings are so accustomed to industrial and technocratic mind-set, Berry opines that, "we have been entranced with the industrial world of wire and wheels, concrete and steel, and our unending highways, where we race back and forth in continued frenzy."[31] The communication formula that Buber suggested has not been accepted in this technocratic mind-set. Berry is optimistic that it will return to the earth community where the focus will be enhancing the presence of humans and the earth for each other.

Another realm of the relationship between earth and life is its 'evolving' nature. Nature is "being" and "becoming," and as such, it manifests, and is related to, the dynamism of the interrelationship of each and every being in the world. The same evolutionary idea of nature is stressed by Teilhard de Chardin. His vision of nature is presented with a picture of universal *genesis* or becoming.[32] Similarly, the relationship between earth and life is not a typified reality, but the quality has to be improved through a process of continued relationship. To qualify the humanity's inter/intra-relationship with the natural world, eco-theologians propose the medium of human body as a valid tool.

> It is the case that human beings are deeply alienated not only from the nonhuman world but also from themselves, their own bodies. Healing the deleterious effects of dualism on our relationship to our own bodies may lead to a greater sense of the sacramentality, integrity and intrinsic value of one's own body, of the bodies of others and of the body of the earth.[33]

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[30]Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology," *Commonweal* 117, 26 January 1990, 46.

[31]Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, Mystics, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991, 1.

[32]For Teilhard, the whole universe is moving forward with an increasing process of 'becoming,' which he termed as *cosmogenesis*, the coming into being and organization of cosmos. The summit of this process of 'becoming' for Teilhard is Omega, the Godhead of everything. See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and* Evolution, London: Collins, 1971, 91-92; also see Ursula King, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, 45.

[33]Christina Vanin, "The Significance of the Incarnation for Ecological Theology: A Challenging Approach," *Ecotheology* 6 (July 2001-January 2002), 118.

The above reflections on human relationship to the outside world realities lead to the affirmation of the value and meaning, the sacredness, of living and non-living beings. Fully awakened by this aspect of relationship of the earth realities and their life, Rasmussen proposes a new ethic of relationship, "partnership model." This model, according to Rasmussen, develops a respect for the earth and for other living things to the point where all are given serious consideration in every aspect of their relationship so as to effect progress and development in the relationship.[34] Equally important to Rasmussen's proposed model is "global ethics," which "confronts global social and ecological problems in global solidarity."[35] These models represent the whole creation as a self-expression of God, the theophany.

4. Seeking Connections: Toward a Critical Approach

The threats of the environment have always been with humanity, but they never reached the hazardous conditions of today. The previously discussed factors that contribute to an ecological crisis, together with the industrial revolution and the invention of chemicals, have become so severe that some predict dire results in the not-too-distant future. This human dominion is manifested in the so-called "power" of humankind: egoistic human power, scientific and technological power, knowledge as power and the power to control and subjugate.

Human consciousness, being the seat of awareness of the things that are occurring inside and outside of one's "microcosm," is the prime faculty that is affected by the impact of the ecological crisis. Therefore, how a person evaluates one's free deliberation before so many changing factors within the context of present ecological crisis that influence humanity's choices becomes an important part of ethics today. This affectivity and deliberations of a person are summarized and evaluated critically below through two analogies: 'Dominion Vs Stewardship' analogy and 'Quantitative Vs Qualitative' analogy.

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[34]Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, 236.

[35]James A. Nash, "Seeking Moral Norms in Nature: Natural Law and Ecological Responsibility," in *Christianity and Ecology*, 241. Commenting on this global ethics, Hans Küng opines, "There is no survival without a world ethic, universal or common, values, ideas, and goals that will optimize the social and ecological common good." Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London: SCM Press, 1990, xv.

4.1. Dominion vs. Stewardship

Among the factors that allow human beings to have a domineering hand over the creation, is the (mis)interpretation of the priestly theology of human dominion – "subdue the earth" – found in Genesis 1. The notion of humanity's having dominion over "all the living things that move on the earth" (Gen 1:28) has been a subject of extreme debate, especially since the much-debated article by Lynn White, in which the author charged that this notion led to a western dualism of humans over nature and resulted in extensive exploitation of the environment.[36] Even though White's criticism could disturb the Christian theological circle, many of its allegations are yet to be evaluated for its veracity.

Considering the most complicated and different aspects of "domination" that aggressively act against nature and which causes ecological damage, this author proposes an alternative paradigm which may move people to grow into an ecological consciousness in contrast to today's power-consciousness of serving and caring through proper stewardship. Genesis 2:15 is often used to champion the notion of stewardship as one of the most appropriate Judeo-Christian concepts for

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[36]White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1203-07. The original meaning of the dominion given to humans over all living things on the earth does not seem to carry any connotation of exploitation or abuse, as being criticized by White. White may be overly influenced by what "dominion" implies to the mind of a twentieth century speaker, questioning whether "dominion" is the type of a control exerted by a ruler over his/her domain. God's entrusting of humans as the head of "all that moves on the earth" is to be understood as a commissioning of human beings as *persons* who belong to the earth and is bound to it and all the other creatures that inhabit it. See Anne M. Clifford, "Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God," in *"And God Saw That It Was Good*," 25. In fact, the position of human beings as responsible *persons* is also considered as a *vocation* – a vocation to be higher and distinguished more clearly from other lives on this earth. Cf. Theodore Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology*, 141-43. All these interpretations strongly challenge the position presented by White, and equally denies any tinge of dominance in the Genesis account of priestly theology. Besides, Claus Westermann points out, the divine charge for humans to name the animals (which was also misinterpreted by some as a mark of dominion) is not an exercise of human power over the animals, nor is it an indication that animals are to be exploited for human ends. He opines, "By naming the animals the man opens up, determines, and orders his world and incorporates them into his life. The world becomes human only through language." Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974, 228.

addressing the environmental question. In order to overcome the denigrating effects of domination of humans over the earth, the stewardship analogy should be ecologically befitting as a paradigm for human consciousness. In the formation of an ecological consciousness, Genesis' relationality serves as a paradigm.

In spite of the paradigmatic possibilities of this stewardship analogy, there are some serious difficulties and dangers attendant to this analogy. Clare Palmer questions whether the stewardship concept is really suitable for addressing many of the complex issues raised by contemporary ecological crisis.[37] The stewardship analogy, it seems, aims to give humans some proprietary rights over the rest of creation, which is strongly challenged by biblical traditions. As the Psalmist puts it: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24:1). Leviticus uncompromisingly insists, "It [the land] must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants" (Lev 25:23).

Taking these dangers into consideration, the analogy of stewardship need not be out-rightly rejected or ignored in an ecological theology. Rather, the stewardship analogy invokes one to rethink and undo the domineering mentality that one has learned before. Instead, one has to become ecologically conscious by caring, nurturing and respecting the environment. The domineering mentality of humans should be curbed to facilitate the inculcation of an ecological consciousness.

4.2. Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Another dimension that creates an ecological imbalance on the earth is the influence of modern scientific and technological advancements. The problems that arise from a misuse of science and technology – the loss of ecological balance, for example – demand that humanity look seriously for

[37]The first difficulty with regard to this analogy is that God is viewed as an absentee landlord who has put human beings in charge of the rest of creation (e.g., Dan 1: 11, Matt 24: 45-51). Having created the world, God has absented himself from its day-to-day activities and left this earth in the hands of humans. Cf. Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," in *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology*, eds., Ian Ball, Margaret Goodall, Clare Palmer, and John Reader, London: SPCK, 1992, 122-41. In addition, within the context of the understanding of this analogy, the earth is reified and becomes either inert property to be cared for or financial resources to be managed in a way that gives a good return on the investment. A reified earth stripped of any divine presence gives a very impoverished understanding of creation. It is, needless to say, challenged from within the biblical tradition itself (cf. Gen 1: 10, 12b, 19; Ps 19: 1, etc.).

a congruent paradigmatic concept to lessen the ecological problems. The mechanistic view that is shaped by the inordinate valueless involvements of science and technology sees people as atomistic individuals whose interacting and interrelationships are valued according to function and utility alone. Sindima explains the trauma of such a mechanistic view:

> Feelings and emotional needs are not important in mechanistic view. Hence, concern and care do not enter into everyday living. Moral conduct in a mechanistic society is often guided by self-interest, and often there is no agreement on what is "moral." Mechanistic society undermines the ties that bind persons and their communities to one another and to the cosmos.[38]

This mechanistic view, fuelled by a scientific enterprise with an extreme thrust for progress, has fallen into the consumerist trap, which eats into the environmental resources without replacing or renewing them. In general, the effects of such a mentality are quantification, fragmentation, reification, division, etc., whereby human and nonhuman are counted not as whole, integral and complete.[39] From an ecological background the quantification tendency is to be matched by a qualitative mentality affirming the wholeness, the unity of all, the communion and interdependence, and making humanity itself a part of this web of relationships which constitute reality as an organic whole.[40] It is qualitative because one with such awareness tries to qualify one's own life by the care and respect one gives to life and of the lives of others. Now, to enhance an ecological consciousness, "what is required is not just a new agenda for the scientific enterprise, but a shift to a new paradigm; from high tech to appropriate technology, from capital intensive inputs to people's participation, from being so professionally exclusive to being more humanly inclusive."[41] The paradigmatic vision to switch humanity's perception towards science and technology may bring a better approach to overcome the present ecological crisis, that is to call a new consciousness, i.e., ecologic consciousness.

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[38]Harvey Sindima, "Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective," in *Liberating Life*, 139.

[39]Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., "Liberating Life: A Report to the World Council of Churches," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 251-70.

[40]Felix Wilfred, "Towards New Frontiers in Inter-religious Dialogue," *FABC* 49, Hong Kong: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, 38.

[41]Rudolf C. Heredia, "Towards an Ecological Consciousness: Religious, Ethical and Spiritual Perspectives – II," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Review 55*, October 1991, 573.

4.3. Ecologic Consciousness

The concept of Ecologic consciousness is viewed by authors in terms of a global consciousness where renewed traditional worldviews and associated environmental ethics corresponding to the historical reality are being stressed. Historically, Asian religions, whether they are the so-called world religions, traditional religions, or subaltern religions, have a deep concern and interest for developing an ecological consciousness among the followers.[42] Asian religions have emphasized the task of inculcating ecological sensitivity by seeking and finding God in and through nature realities. According to Thottakkara, "Discovering God's presence and revelation in the cosmos and in creation is a religious act, and therefore there is a religious dimension for ecology and ecological concerns."[43]

It was this same ecologic consciousness that was considered as the trans-historic consciousness by the Asian Religions. The trans-historical consciousness ("ecological consciousness"), so called third stage in the developmental process of the human person's consciousness, is that demands a reinterpretation of the pre-historic consciousness according to the praxis of today's societies. Trans-historic consciousness is a new phase of the human consciousness, which brings about a global consciousness and an awareness that all human beings and all material creatures are inter-related in a unity of rich diversity, and through our human effort responsibly create such a new world.[44] Here, it is seen that no evolution infallibly can bring the human being into such a loving

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[42]By making such a general statement, this thesis does not want to establish that all Asian/world religions are practicing or admonishing to practice their followers to practice a spotless ecological awareness. In the process of living out the values of the founders, sometimes it happens that some religious traditions concentrate only on the spiritual dimensions of the followers and preach and teach the ways and means for their eschatological good and happiness in the other world. "This material world ...is often, unfortunately, regarded as of lesser value and worth and deserved only second rate attention." Augustine Thottakara, *Eco-Dynamics of Religion: Thoughts for the Third Millennium*, Bangalore: Journal of Dharma & Dharmaram Publications, 2000, 7.

[43]Thottakara, *Eco-Dynamics of Religion*, 8.

[44]"Contemplating such an international, scientifically grounded and expressed environmental ethic – global in scope as well as focus – I also envision the revival of a multiplicity of traditional cultural environmental ethics that resonate with it and that help to articulate it." J. Baird Callicott, "Toward a Global Environmental Ethic," in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, 37.

community without humanity's free choice. Rather than an enforced, inescapable evolution into such a unity, the humanity must view this stage of planetary oneness as a challenge to all human creations to bring about such loving unity through creative service to the whole world.

Trans-historical consciousness, thus, speaks not about an actualized reality; it is a new perspective which can enable the present humanity to undo the negative repercussions of the effects of the historic consciousness. Trans-historical consciousness, thus, urges a change from the present historic consciousness to an ecological one whereby one may be able to view the earth as holistic and as a place where God could be intimately experienced. Teilhard's spirituality has much to offer here, for he was "madly in love with the divine influence which guides the world."[45] It transcends the experience of historic consciousness and comes to a sense of appreciation of the world for its own goodness. To change such a framework or *Weltanschauung* and to acquire a new consciousness, Berry insists that the creative power from any new, holographic vision of human beings is a part of the Earth and of all living and non-living creatures can be found in the awareness of the human being.

> All these [living and non-living creatures] are means whereby we articulate our special mode of being and fulfil our role in the universal order of things, all in response to the spontaneities that emerge from our genetic coding; ultimately, of course, they emerge from the larger community of life, from the integral functioning of the planet Earth, from the comprehensive functioning of the planet Earth, from the comprehensive functioning of the universal order of things, and from the numinous source from which all things receive their being, their energy, and their inherent grandeur.[46]

It retrieves the religious insight that all human beings are not only interdependent with each other but also with all created nature through a sense of community. Thus, treading on the path toward trans-historical consciousness is also a religious act, and the concern is truly ecological.

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[45]Henri De Lubac, *The Faith of Teilhard de Chardin*, London: Burns and Oates, 1964, 74-75. The nuance of the quote shows that Teilhard actually experienced the world as animated by God and was able to feel divine energy in all material things around him.

[46]Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988, 200.

5. A Critical Evaluation

This article was trying to shed some light on the very notion of ecological reality itself; apart from the crisis situation of ecological reality, it explains the other side of ecological reality, i.e., the praxis aspect of it, which is very often forgotten or ignored. The nuance of such a danger is seen in the message of Pope John Paul II for the World Peace Day, 1991, where the Pope reminds the people that a lack of respect for nature should be added to the arms race, local wars, and injustices as a threat to world peace.

Within the perimeters of this presentation, thus, ecological reality is a matter of critical concern, and this concern has been evaluated in terms of praxis. Even if the crisis situation deteriorates day by day, humanity has an obligation to maintain the balance and health of earth. In exercising this responsibility, the praxes that we take up serve as a paradigm to develop an ecological consciousness centred on "earth-theology." As certain eco-theologians argue, one of the main features of this "earth-theology" will be to cultivate a 'culture of care' for the earth realities. Christiansen presents the urgency in developing such a culture:

> The appropriate expression for that human energy, the healing channel for our anxiety in this ecological age is – under the inspiration of the Gospel – to develop a culture of care. Just as the age of domination was followed by the age of possession, so it is time that the civilization of possession give place to a culture of care.[47]

In spite of the growing ecological degradation, the ecological culture should serve as a paradigm for cultivating ecological awareness, and forming One Earth community. From an Asian point of view, this culture of care is not a new ethical system; it has been in the traditional heritage of the Asian blood until it was diluted and/or replaced through a transfusion of an 'imported life-style' from the West, which are characterized by dominion attitude, mechanistic mentality, developmental thrust, etc.

In this connection, a question may arise: 'What about those primitive people who felled down trees, hunted and killed animals and even destroyed certain eco-systems?' Can the ecological consciousness that was predominantly followed in these peoples' lives be generalized? These questions have to be evaluated within the perimeters of ecological ethics and ethical principles that were followed and respected in their life. Their life was closely integrated with the ecological community of which they were all interdependent parts. Their ethic rests upon a single premise, as

[47]Drew Christiansen, "Christian Theology and Ecological Responsibility," *America* 116, May 23, 1992, 451.

Aldo Leopold provides a fundamental ethical criterion for the use of the land/animals/resources of earth by primitive people: A human decision "is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[48] This premise safeguards the primitive peoples' acts of making use of the land and its resources for their "vital needs," which is entirely different from the motivational or generated use of modern peoples' "economic needs" or "consumptive needs."[49] Within this perspective, the action of the people of historic consciousness (technocrats) can be evaluated. Their intention in destroying the eco-systems of earth can in no way, thus, justified within the premise that was discussed above.

The basic attitudinal difference in propagating a technological consciousness originates out of the lack of respect for nature: Nature is viewed as a commodity out of which profit is generated. Here, again, the sublime notion of the ecological consciousness is disrupted; nature's sacramental character is ignored. Such a disruptive perception is seen as a threat and danger to the "ecological egalitarianism."[50] Apart from the mere physical and material value-oriented aspect of earth and eco-systems of the earth, this article reiterates the sacramentality of nature and the divine character that is deeply embedded in every earth-realities.

A third justification to preserve the ecological consciousness as a desired human consciousness within the ambit of this article originates out of a unique Asian religious consciousness. Asian religions, in a way, agree

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[48]Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, reprinted 1987, 203, 244-45. The author here distinguishes the difference in human perception regarding the use and abuse of land or any other earth-resources. He argues that the pre-historical people saw the land, even if they felled down trees, as a community to which they belonged to and learned to use it with love and respect. Instead, the modern humans abused the land by the same act of felling down trees because they see the land and trees as a 'commodity'.

[49]Daniel G. Campos, "Assessing the Value of Nature: A Transactional Approach," *Environmental Ethics* 24 (Spring 2002), 60-63. Here "vital needs" are distinguished from "economic needs" where the former originates out of the necessity to survive, whereas, the latter is to satisfy 'created' needs, such as the needs of a consumer society.

[50]This expression is used by Arne Naess, a deep ecologist, who argues for a sort of 'democracy of the biosphere.' Naess stands for the intrinsic right of all things to "live and to blossom" free from excessive human interference. Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Ranged Ecology Movement: A Summary," *Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1973), 95-100.

and propagate this value consciousness as an essential feature of religiosity. 'Respect life' and 'promote life' (pro-life) are considered as dictums of Asian religious consciousness. Such a major consensus of the religions of Asia fundamentally contradicts the type of awareness that the historic consciousness (technocratic) supports. In successfully showing the depth and breadth of the tradition concerning creation, and the possibilities of extending it to more contemporary circumstances, these Asian religions play a convincing role within the levels of their conscientization process by focusing and projecting the traditional values of the creation. Importantly, these religions also warn their flock not to be duped with the destructive tendencies that are being disseminated by the technocratic consciousness, and thereby to be disillusioned to become agents of biocide. Now it is high time to recognize the inspirational charisma of these religions, and become aware of the great Asian tradition that humans are related to all the members of the Earth community as their kin, an intricate and ancient family tree that comprises all parts of Earth since its origin. In spite of the growing ecological degradation, the eco-ethical norms and principles can serve as a paradigm for cultivating ecological awareness, and forming One Earth Community – in Thomas Berry's term, a "communion of subjects" with whom humans are to live fittingly.[51]

A stress on this kind of qualitative and value-oriented life prompts the Church to make an urgent response to the present ecological crisis. The moral status of nature can and must be seen to dwell at the very heart of Christianity, beneath all particular methodological and traditional approaches. In successfully showing the depth and breadth of the tradition concerning creation, and the possibilities of extending it to more contemporary circumstances, the Asian Church can play a convincing role within the levels of its conscientization process by focusing and projecting the traditional theological boundary of a loving Creator who values the creation, who charges human beings to do the same, and who promises to retain, even if transformed, all that is lovingly valued.

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[51]Thomas Berry consistently uses this phrase and similar expressions in his works to remind the role of humans in creating unity among the beings in this world by shedding aside the superiority complex of humanity over against nature in a manipulative, polluting way of life. Humanity as "community of subjects," thus, takes precedence over all other exploitative tendencies of humans by which inexpressible amount of agony and pain are being created on this earth. See his work, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the* Earth, Mystics, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991.

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Reflection

GOD IN NATURE
My Experience with *Clean Himalaya*

Jose Karakunnel♦

1. Introduction

"In the Western tradition, there is an old metaphor called the two books of God that expresses the different ways to access the mystery of God. God has given us the Bible as well as the book of nature to know Him."[1] The Book of Nature is the book that is written by God, whereas the books of the Bible are written by human authors under divine inspiration, according to Catholic theology. It is, however, shocking to note that desecration of the holy scriptures of any religion is responded with thousand protests, but the desecration of the second holy book, the nature goes unnoticed. If anybody helps to clean a holy place, it is considered a noble work and they believe that they will get a reward from God. The pity is that nobody worries about dirtying nature, which also has God's presence in it. No one worries about making our surroundings unclean by throwing waste, plastic and garbage. Very few people understand God's presence in everything, as it was understood in ancient times.

We are very careful to keep our places of worship clean and beautiful, because we want to feel the presence of God there, as beauty is always associated with God. It is said, "*Satyam shivam sundaram*" (Truth is eternal and beautiful). Are we not fools to limit the omnipresence of God within the limits of the four walls of our places of worship? If we are able to find the presence of God in everything, we will naturally keep our environment clean and will beautify it, as a place of worship. But the people who actually clean our surroundings and restore its beauty are often disrespected. Jesus took incarnation to clean humankind of its sins and restores its old beauty, and in a similar way the municipality cleaners, road sweepers and rag pickers are cleaning the environment to restore the lost beauty of the nature. They carry the burden of sins of the present day

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[1]Florio, "A Second Naivety in the Contemplation of Nature," *Third Millennium* 13, 4 (October-December 2010), 6-19, 6.

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atrocities done to the nature by the human kind in their sacks. Will a day come, when the rag pickers are accepted as the saviours of the nature?

2. The Road Less Travelled

I would like to share my experience with *Clean Himalaya*, a Non-Government Organization (NGO) guided by Ma Amritarupanandaji from the Sivananda Ashram. This NGO works to make people aware of global warming, the ecological system and the duty to protect our environment and surroundings. With this purpose in mind, there is a group of dedicated workers, under the manager ship of Jitendra Kumarji, who go from house to house to collect waste and recycle it so that it is not thrown out to the roads, into the gutters or even into the Ganges. This NGO also has got a group of volunteers who regularly go along the banks of the Ganges, ravines and roads near Rishikesh to collect plastic and other waste materials. Through this work they are making people aware of the need to keep the surroundings clean and tidy.

I am one of those volunteers with *Clean Himalaya* who go every Saturday to clean the streets and gutters, and my team includes the other brothers of Samanvaya community. I joined the group of volunteers out of curiosity, and I was happy when I got a shirt with Clean Himalaya's logo, a badge on which "Volunteer" is written and a pair of red gloves. But my heart sank when Amritarupananda Mataji opened a packet and gave each of us a garbage-collection bag. We went out to the roads and gutters, and after one hour of this tedious work I was really exhausted. Collecting plastics and garbage from the gutters was really disgusting, but yet, the first plastic packet I collected did not go to the sack but into my pocket, since I wanted to keep it as a souvenir!

Often we had to go into extremely filthy places. They were wet, foul-smelling and contained all the possible waste materials that one could imagine. I had to go to the very places I would have otherwise avoided during my walks. People who put these waste materials there want the waste to be very far from them, so very often they throw it from a certain distance to these places. I was supposed to go and collect the waste with my own hands from a place where I was not even willing to walk. As I was collecting garbage, I saw the local people – from whom I used to walk away, as they seldom took bath and had a foul smell – they were covering their noses and walking away from me! I was surprised; I smelled myself and found that I really smelled foul. More than that, the collection bag

with all the waste materials was wet and dirty and had a very bad smell which I had never experienced before.

Thereafter, I chose to collect from the roadsides that were cleaner and had less waste. I was careful to avoid the gutters and the wet places because there would be plenty of garbage. So, I used to change from one side of the road to the other to avoid coming face to face with the heap of waste and wet plastic materials which I was supposed to collect. When I was coming back after the first day as a rag picker, I was thinking, "How can I avoid this volunteer work next Saturday?" I had already decided that I wouldn't come next Saturday for this disgusting work.

3. Breaking the Barrier

The following week we had classes on Luke and Acts by Fr. Babu Chirayath. He was speaking about eco-spirituality and the importance of preserving our environment, since our lives are interdependent. He drew our attention to certain facts and values about the environment. For example, ten thousand Tulsi plants are being planted around the Taj Mahal to protect it from becoming black because of the carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide produced from the vehicles and industries in the area. Even shifting all the industries from its vicinity did not help much, so this solution – the natural curative method for the Taj Mahal – was proposed: to plant the highest oxygen-producing plants around it. This had a huge positive impact on the monument. And I really understood these words, "every creature co-operates with God; shares in the act which God is, participates in divine creativity, and has its own activity."[2]

When I reflected upon it, I understood that all these plants and trees have lives and that my own life is dependent on them. More than that, if somebody comes to cut a tree it is not able to protect itself, nor does it have a voice to cry for help, and it does not have hands and feet to defend itself or run away. If somebody were to throw some waste on it, it would not be able to clean itself. God created human beings as the crown of his creation and blessed them with the faculty of reason to take care of the environment and to protect and uphold the dignity of the lesser creations. "Human beings are made in such a way that they always find themselves with and in the creation. Proceeding in accordance with the divine thrust which they bear, having received it from God, in whose image and

[2]Nehring Andreas, *Ecology A Theological Response*, Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College,1993, 186.

likeness human kind is made."[3] With this inspiration I decided to continue with the cleaning of the streets.

The next Saturday when I went out for cleaning, I chose the best dress I had, and instead of sandals I wore covered shoes. I made it a point to speak in English and that too loud enough to be audible to the passersby, so that the people would not think that I was an ordinary rag picker. I also made it a point that, not to collect the wet and smelling waste materials so that people would not avoid me. I observed myself: I was handsome dressed in my best attire; I did not smell foul because I was collecting only the dry plastic, more than that, I was speaking in English. But to my surprise I had the same experience – people just walked away from me! I was thoroughly disappointed.

Add to it, one of the local women in the shanties – whom I could easily identify from her dress as a daily labourer from another state – asked me to collect the plastic which was piled up behind her temporary house. I was surprised and humiliated. An English-speaking, handsome young man is asked by an ordinary poor woman to clean the backyard of her house. I lost my temper, but I did not say anything; I left the place unclean. Even an English-speaking rag picker is just like any other rag picker; a person cleaning the streets will be seen by others only as a rag picker. He is never considered as a better human being, at least as a social worker who does this unpleasant work of carrying the burden of others sins done to the nature, in his collection bag.

In addition to the humiliating experience, there was a foreign woman working that day as a volunteer and she said, "We are not doing anything good by picking up the garbage by the roads. We are just giving reasons for the people to put more waste on the roads and in the gutters, because they know that we will clean it every week." She then quit right in the middle of the work. I had every reason to stop the cleaning with that Saturday.

4. Tears of Ganges

That Saturday night and the following day were raining incessantly, after the morning Mass I went to have a look at the Ganges. The people call her Ma Ganga (Mother Ganges) comparing her with the love of a mother. She was in flood – breaching her banks and gushing with destructive power. Some people said that she was very angry and that she was going to destroy all. Indeed, it was the biggest flood for the present generation;

[3]Boff Leonardo, *Ecology and Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, 47.

nothing so furious had been seen in the past fifty years. I was surprised to see her so violent, because from my past few months' experience I had seen her calm, quiet and soothing, creating in me also a feeling of calmness and peace. But today her sight brings shivers in my body and I just want to be away from her.

As I came back to my seminary, I was in a dilemma. The Ganges which had been so calm and used to give me so much joy now created restlessness and fear in me. I pondered the reasons behind her fury. I came to the conclusion that God has created the earth just like a sponge. As the rainwater falls on the surface of the earth, the earth absorbs that water and releases it slowly and continuously to the adjoining rivers. This system provides enough ground water as well as keeps the amount of water same in the rivers throughout the year. More than that, it prevents immediate flooding after heavy rain.

But all the roads and houses we have constructed, and the plastic that we throw to our surroundings act like a polythene layer over the surface of the earth, preventing the rainwater from being absorbed. As a result, whenever there is an extreme amount of rainfall, the water gushes through the gutters to the Ganges, suffocating her with garbage and run-off. Mother Ganges is not angry, but she is struggling to save her children as she bears the burden of her children's mistakes. Adding to her agony, human beings have encroached the surrounding mountains. They have eradicated the vegetation, cut down the trees and caused havoc in the environment by creating the conditions for landslides. When the heavy rain comes, so much surface soil is washed into the Ganges, and she is being suffocated by this soil. I must to do something to reduce her pain. Since I knew "the ecclesial community must feel part of the human community, and the human community has to feel it is part of the cosmic community."[4] I decided to be more active in my cleaning.

5. Manifestation of God

On the following Saturday I was very happy to go with the *Clean Himalaya* volunteers, because I knew that I was helping the Ganges whom I loved so much. That day, for the first time, I thought about the *Clean Himalaya* programme from another perspective. Till that time I had been looking at it from my own point of view and the profits I would receive from it. But from that day onwards I was looking at things from the Ganges' point of view. This perspective made me happy, and I spoke

[4]Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*,48

about it with my fellow volunteers. To my surprise for the first time I noticed that Amritarupananda Mataji was very happy doing this disgusting work. She had the smiling face of a mother carrying her child as she was carrying the waste. I could see that I too was growing more altruistic, and this personal growth made me happier. Now I know that if anybody wants to be happy, one should not be selfish, but should find real happiness in serving. We often limit our understanding of service to helping our fellow human beings. But that day I understood the broader meaning of brotherhood and sisterhood as St. Francis of Assisi lived: "St. Francis used the loving terms brother and sister to address the moon, fire and water and even weeds, as we all have God as our father."[5] Service is not a term to be limited to helping just human beings but it also includes the service to the nature. Being a sanniyasin for more than 30 years must have helped the Mataji to understand the wider meaning of service. I have uncovered the secret of her smile even when she carries the waste.

That week we had classes on Christology by Fr. Kuriakkose Mananthil, in which he explained the love of God as being the reason for his manifestation. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son for our salvation. He was also speaking about recapitulation (the evolving back of everything to Godhead). From that class I understood not only humankind but the whole of creation is growing back to God. I was convinced that by making the salvation of human beings possible, the establishment of the Kingdom of God is not fully made possible on this earth. We need to consider the salvation of this whole world because they too are my sisters and brothers, whose care and salvation is also my responsibility. With these thoughts, I continued the *Clean Himalaya* sanitation work. I felt so happy, and I never felt the need to speak in English in order to be recognized as someone other than an ordinary rag picker. I intentionally chose the dirtiest places by the side of the road, and I was very particular to collect even the smallest piece of waste. The work was tiresome and smelling, but I felt joy in doing it.

6. Consistent in Commotion

The following week we had classes on Grace by Fr. Davis Varayilan, where he spoke about the Christian understanding of Communitarian salvation; we do not have an individual salvation but our salvation is communitarian, which means salvation of the universe. My global family includes not only human beings but also birds, animals, trees and

[5]Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 52.

everything that I see around me. We need to consider the world as one family. As a human being – the crown of God's creation – I have a duty to lead and guide the entire creation back to God. I was convinced that when I remove the waste from the places, I am helping that place to restore its beauty back. This beautification will bring everything closer to God because beauty is always associated with God. This process will lead to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

That Saturday the volunteers for *Clean Himalaya* were led by Mataji to a new place where we had not yet gone. I was shocked to see the piles of plastic and heaps of waste there. I was disappointed, and I knew even if I cleaned for an entire week, that place was not going to be fully cleaned; there was so much of waste. I didn't know what to do, and I was totally confused. Because I thought if I want to be saved it is possible only if all of God's creations are restored back to their original beauty. As our salvation is communitarian, as long as there is a single part of creation which is not fully ready to welcome the second coming of Jesus, there will not be the establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth. I found no solution to this.

Then on Sunday, Fr. Davis gave us a reflection. We should not be so selfish and so particular that this work must be completed in and through me in my lifetime. Who knows the plan of God? Everything on this earth has a particular reason, which we may not be able to grasp. God has got a particular plan which will be fulfilled in due time. It is not for me to say that this work should be completed by me alone. I also reflected that I need not feel so bad thinking that I am the only one facing an insurmountable work. For as I do my work, even apparently alone, I am supported by the power of God that brings all His creations back to Himself. Not only that, I am supported by all others who have the same aptitude and join the same cause anywhere else in the world as they are also supported by the same power of God. These reflections gave me the much needed peace of mind.

7. Conclusion

The ordering of the universe in chapter one of *Genesis* reflects the construction of a temple. The firmament is made like a dome or a vault with luminary bodies. Constructing of this cosmic temple is completed by creating human beings in the image and likeness of God and placing them at the centre, to be the stewards of the entire creation. Moreover, God blessed the human beings with reason to lead the entire creation back to God. Forgetting these responsibilities, human beings destroy the natural

order, and limit God's presence within the walls of their places of worship – leaving their surroundings unclean which is the cosmic temple of God created by God and given to the stewardship of human beings. They have the responsibility to protect it, at least not to destroy it; if it is destroyed to restore back its old beauty. As Jesus came to restore the broken relationship of human beings with God, the need of the hour is saviours who restore back the broken relationship of human beings with nature.

The concept of finding the presence of God in everything is in tune with the Indian ethos and cultural heritage. Thousands of years back the ancient *Rishies* of India taught the people to find the presence of God in everything around them. The opening verse of *Isavasya Upanisad*, "*isa vasyam idam sarvam*" is one of those teachings. Similar vision is practised when one is taught to greet the other with *Namaste*. The word *Namaste* means "I see God in you". That is the reason when one greets a person with *Namaste* he /she holds the hands and just bows the head. The typical bowing and holding of the hands are done by an Indian only in front of God, or to say, Indians understand the other as God. Going a step further the ancient sears also found the presence of God in all the creation of God. When one person bows before a tree or a river, we need to understand that, the person has grown up to a stage, to find the omnipresence of God in everything around him or her. Let us wish and pray that all may understand the presence of God in everything around us, especially in the nature. Let us respect the presence of God in the nature rather than limiting His presence to the places of worship.

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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

1. Introduction

World Environment Day (WED) is an annual event that is aimed at being the biggest and most widely celebrated global day for positive environmental action. WED activities take place all year round but climax on 5 June every year, involving everyone from everywhere.

WED celebration began in 1972 and has grown to become the one of the main vehicles through which the UN stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and encourages political attention and action.

Through WED, the UN Environment Programme is able to personalize environmental issues and enable everyone to realize not only their responsibility, but also their power to become agents for change in support of sustainable and equitable development.

WED is also a day for people from all walks of life to come together to ensure a cleaner, greener and brighter outlook for themselves and future generations.[1]

India, the first time global host of World Environment Day, marked the occasion with a week of colourful events across the country from Bangalore to New Delhi, lead by the The Minister for Environment and Forests in India, Jairam Ramesh and UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner. 5 June was marked by a series of Green Marathons and walkathons, organized by various groups around India to raise awareness and show support for conservation efforts and green policies. "Forests: Nature at your Service" was the theme of this year's WED.[2]

2. Forests: Nature at Your Service

Forests cover one third of the earth's land mass, performing vital functions and services around the world which make our planet alive with possibilities. In fact, 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods. They play a key role in our battle against climate change, releasing oxygen into the atmosphere while storing carbon dioxide.

Forests feed our rivers and are essential to supplying the water for nearly 50% of our largest cities. They create and maintain soil fertility; they help to regulate the often devastating impact of storms, floods and fires.

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[1]http://www.unep.org/wed/about/

[2]http://www.unep.org/wed/news/wrapup.asp

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Splendid and inspiring, forests are the most biologically diverse ecosystems on land, and are home to more than half of the terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects.

Forests also provide shelter, jobs, security and cultural relevance for forest-dependent populations. They are the green lungs of the earth, vital to the survival of people everywhere -- all seven billion of us.

Forests embody so much of what is good and strong in our lives. Yet despite all of these priceless ecological, economic, social and health benefits, we are destroying the very forests we need to live and breathe.

Global deforestation continues at an alarming rate -- every year, 13 million hectares of forest are destroyed. That's equal to the size of Portugal.

Short-term investments for immediate gains (e.g., logging) compound these losses. People who depend on forests for their livelihoods are struggling to survive. Many precious species face extinction. Biodiversity is being obliterated. What's more, economists around the world have proven that by not integrating the values of forests into their budgets, countries and businesses are paying a high price. One that ultimately impoverishes us all as harm to our forest life-support system continues each and every single day.

But this trend is not irreversible. It's not too late to transform life as we know it into a greener future where forests are at the heart of our sustainable development and green economies.

Conserving forests and expanding them need to be recognized as a business opportunity. When we add it up, an investment of US$30 billion fighting deforestation and degradation could provide a return of US$2.5 trillion in new products and services.

Furthermore, targeted investments in forestry could generate up to 10 million new jobs around the world. Already, many leaders are glimpsing the potential for renewable energy and nature-based assets, but for transformation to happen, forests need to become a universal political priority.

The services forests provide are essentially to every aspect of our quality of life. And the answer to sustainable forest management, moving towards a green economy, lies in our hands.

Doesn't knowing this make it so much easier to see the forest from the trees![3]

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[3]http://www.unep.org/wed/theme/

3. Saving Forests Requires a Change in Lifestyle

If you ever wondered how it would be possible for you to save an entire forest then look no further than making simple lifestyle changes. Forests play multiple roles in our lives, including providing a source of livelihood, refuge for many species, and clean air for all.

As a result of the growing global pollution levels forests have often come to be referred to as the 'lungs of the earth'. This is particularly because deforestation and forest degradation account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which forests would absorb if carefully managed.

Broadly, there are three main sources of forest degradation: commercial logging, fires, and gathering wood for fuel. Insects and pests also cause considerable forest degradation.

Deforestation is the reduction of forest cover, notably viewed by the loss of trees. Commercial logging and fires are examples of causes of deforestation. It is however possible to use forests in a properly managed way that maintains their existence. There is therefore no deforestation if there is a guarantee of continuity in maintaining the forest cover.

Degradation refers to the loss of quality of the forests, rather than coverage. The quality of a forest can be observed through monitoring the survival rates of its ecosystem, for example vegetation layers, soil, flora and fauna. Some of the causes of forest degradation are the gathering of wood for fuel, and insects and pests.

As a resource, forests provide many important natural resources, such as timber, fuel, rubber, paper and medicinal plants. Forests also help sustain the quality and availability of freshwater supplies. More than three quarters of the world's accessible freshwater comes from forested catchments. Water quality declines with decreases in forest condition and cover, and natural hazards such as floods, landslides, and soil erosion have larger impacts

It's well known that forests play a key role in our battle against climate change; storing carbon and sucking in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it into their biomass.

But what's less well known is that the products and services they provide are essential to every aspect of life. By regulating water for many of the world's rivers, they help secure water quality, and supply nearly half of the world's largest cities from Caracas to New York. They also help decrease the impacts of storms and floods, whilst helping control erosion.

As the most biologically diverse ecosystems on land, forests are home to more than half of terrestrial species, from the great apes to the smallest of creatures.

They also provide homes, security and livelihoods for 60 million Indigenous peoples, whilst contributing to the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people worldwide.

The impact of forests reaches even further. In many developing countries more than 80% of total energy consumed by people and industry derives from forests. Such as fuel wood and charcoal. Trade in timber and other forest products, is estimated at almost 330 billion US Dollars /year. Its value multiplies as its processed into a myriad of products used globally every day. Use of the genetic diversity within forests enables the development of new medicines; progress in healthcare and science.

Forests cover 31% of total land area while at the same time supporting 80% of terrestrial biodiversity that live in them. Many of the world's most threatened and endangered animals live in these forests, making them crucial to sustaining ecosystems. Not only animals live in the forests, as they also provide a home to more than 300 million people worldwide.

4. World Environment Day and Forests

Beyond supporting the natural habitat, forests sustain economic growth. In 2004 trade in forest products was estimated at $327 billion. Continued and uncontrolled deforestation therefore not only has devastating consequences for the environment, the wildlife and communities, but for economies around the world.

Rather shockingly, 36 million acres of natural forest are lost each year. World Environment Day (WED) chose this year's theme, 'Forests: Nature at Your Service', to encourage forest conservation and sustainable consumption for green growth, and in support of the UN International Year of Forests initiative. Preserving forests throughout the world has to be in our collective consciousness so as to change our lifestyles.

In September 2008, United Nations launched a collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries.

The UN-REDD Programme assists developing countries prepare and implement national REDD+ strategies, and builds on the convening power and expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Programme currently has 29 partner countries spanning Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. REDD+ is seen as one of the most cost-effective ways of stabilizing the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to avoid a temperature rise of two degrees Celsius.

But standing forests also conserve carbon while supporting the livelihoods of a large number of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities as well providing essential ecosystem services such as habitat for biodiversity and provisioning clean water supplies.

5. Conclusion

A quick and easy way to get involved is to make others aware of the forests issues by sharing this website, organizing an event, or participating in this year's WED celebrations.

Governments should develop and implement policies that encourage sustainable use of forests. They should consider cordoning off areas inhabited by endangered species and promote forest restoration where they have been depleted.

Private companies have an opportunity to invest wisely into the new Green Economy whilst developing a socially responsible status with its consumers. They can develop procurement processes that buy only into sustainably managed forests, such as products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Be the first in your organization to shift your company policies towards green growth!

Civil society can play a significant role by independently monitoring all parties involved, raising awareness on forests and supporting grassroots initiatives.

Like private companies, individuals can make wise premeditated choices over what products they will buy and only purchasing forest products that originate from sustainable sources. This means checking that furniture, wood, paper and other products you buy are verified as coming from legal sources. A quick and easy way to do this is checking for an FSC certification logo.

Most importantly, taking action on forests requires an ongoing commitment to changing lifestyle and therefore is not a one-off action. Your new lifestyle demands that you are forest-conscious in all your choices, consumption and actions.[4]

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[4]http://www.unep.org/wed/forestfacts/

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BOOK REVIEW

Christoph Stückelberger and Jesse N. K. Mugambi, eds., *Responsible Leadership: Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*, Nairobi: WCC Publications, 2009, pages: 358; ISBN: 978-2-8254-1516-0.

This book, co-edited by Stückelberger and Mugambi, is very enriching as it offers formative orientations and strategies about the responsible leadership in a global context. It is a collection of 39 contributions (speeches and papers) from 21 countries which were presented in the conference organised by Globethics.net (September 2005), whose founder and executive director is Stückelberger himself. The authors are scholars in applied ethics, ethicists and practitioners from different continents. According to the editors, "All authors are rooted in their own context and try, at the same time, to overcome it in situations of transformation and to confront it with global challenges" (2); hence, their contributions are rich, fascinating, innovative, and open towards new global perspectives about responsible leadership and good governance.

There is a general trend identifiable throughout the book. All authors are somehow convinced that each group of human beings has one or many leaders, from a small couple/family without a child up to the United Nations. No group or association can live or survive without a leader. At the same time, there is a general feeling that these people are badly governed, especially as most of associations, families, governments, and religions lack in responsible leadership. Plato was among the first philosophers to notice this indisputable fact and thought that his *Republic* would make radical changes in which the philosopher would become the Philosopher King: "Finally, I came to conclusion that all existing states were badly governed, and that their constitutions were incapable of reform without drastic treatment and a great deal of good luck" (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. D. Lee, 6). I think this edited book is similar to Plato's *Republic*. The authors of different articles are on the same line and feel the necessity to form or educate people for a good leadership starting from our families. In our increasingly globalized world, there is a need for more interaction among value systems for the emergence of good governance and to fight against corruption. Trade, media, tourism, encounters, conferences, migration, internet, publications, etc., constitute the first few ingredients in inculcating a value-based society.

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The book is divided into five parts. The first part is dedicated to responsible family leadership. Experiences are taken from China, Cameroon, South Korea, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Kenya, and Ghana. The major topics discussed are engendering, dialogue between a Confucian and a Christian, marriage, and the value of family itself.

So fascinating is the second part which makes an urgent call for a "responsible religious leadership." This part is worthwhile to be read. Twelve different authors from different religions discuss the problem of leadership in religions and demonstrate that even religions lack leadership just like what is happening in the secular societies. Issues like freedom of belief, rights of religious minority, gender responsibility, role of women in the churches, corruption and integrity, and segregation (racism/tribalism/caste) are clearly discussed and each author tries to give a specific orientation to a given challenge in the given context.

The third part of the book deals with "Responsible Business leadership." This part did not appeal too much for me. It discusses the issues that are regularly discussed in the media about our globalised world of business/money and its challenges. Today's world is business minded and the seven authors ask themselves the following question: Is there any business ethics? All of them agree on the necessity to have a code of moral principles and rules of economic activity by strengthening the new value of common good. The earth is our supreme common good because we are all guests on earth, and responsible stewards.

The fourth and last part is the most crucial one. It is about "Responsible Political Leadership." Without responsible political leaders, it is very difficult to achieve other aspects of human life like education, health, peace, security, environment protection policies, freedom, fight against poverty, etc. Good politics is a goal that has to be implemented. As far as good governance is concerned Asia, Africa, and Latin America have still a long way to go. Most of their countries suffer from oppressive leaders, corruption, and military rule without any policies to protect the environment.

The conclusion of this book, "Globeethics.Net Elements for Responsible Leadership," offers a summary of the results of the international conference held in Bangkok, Thailand, 22-26 September 2005. For the realization of responsible family leadership, they suggested that the overall criterion in family leadership is love and education understood as actions. Responsible religious leadership becomes

ridiculous by being oppressive in the name of God; therefore, it should take into account the rights of religious minorities, promote dialogue with other religions, and should be independent from politicians or state. Most of serious crises have as their origin, explicitly or implicitly, financial control and money. Therefore, a responsible business should be transparent, fair, and honest. Finally, there is an urgent need to foster a responsible political leadership. They should keep promise, seek and protect common interest and think globally but act locally according to the context.

Finally, this work offers an effective opportunity to relate various themes covered to the contemporary events and recent catastrophes that have shaken the stability of many parts of the world, especially in Japan. The tsunami and earthquake in Japan on Friday 18 March 2011, which was the direct cause of the burst of the nuclear stations of Fukushima and the radioactivity leaks, show that common policies are needed to protect our world. But all this can be applied in different areas of human life, as we live in the global village, and thanks to the media, we know more or less what is going on in different parts of the world. An awareness of these events and the much needed ethical deliberation facilitated by the responsible leadership that Stückelberger and Mugambi have successfully initiated in this edited work for the emergence of a global as well as contextual ethical perspectives.

Juvénal Sibomana

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